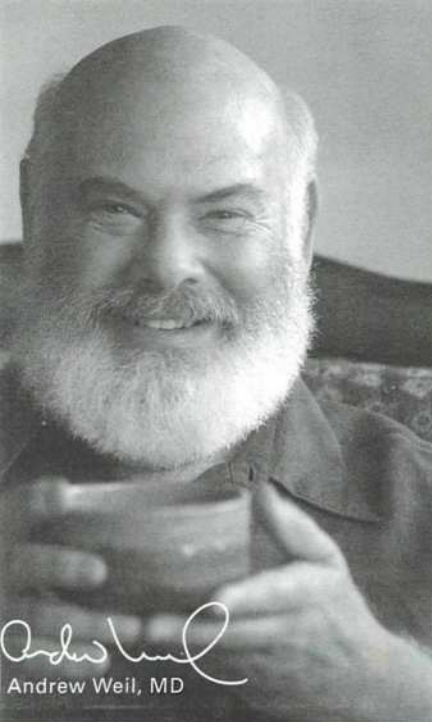




Andrew Weil
Andrew Weil, MD

ON MY MIND

Andrographis

The last few times that I've come down with a cold, I've taken the herb andrographis. A widely used cold remedy in Scandinavia, this botanical is also known as Kan jang or Indian echinacea.

Why try? Andrographis's key ingredients, called andrographolides, are believed to reduce the duration, severity, and complications of colds and flus. A 2004 review of seven studies with a total of 896 participants confirmed that andrographis is more effective than a placebo in reducing cold and flu symptoms (*Planta Medica*, April 2004). At least one study found the herb to be more effective than echinacea against early cold symptoms in children, and recent research suggests it has anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and immune-boosting properties.

How to take: At the onset of cold or flu symptoms, I suggest taking a tablet containing 4 percent andrographolides, four times a day with meals. Andrographis doesn't appear to interfere with other herbs and supplements, but it might increase the risk of bleeding when taken with blood-thinning medications. **SP**

Dr. Andrew Weil's

JANUARY 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Six Fabulous Foods for 2006

What's ahead for food and nutrition in 2006? I hope to see more movement toward an anti-inflammatory diet. This eating plan is not truly a "diet" but rather the nutritional component of a healthy lifestyle. It recommends more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and foods rich in omega-3 fats such as salmon, walnuts, and ground flax and cuts back on animal protein, saturated and trans fats, as well as foods made from refined flour and sugar. Eating this way can help prevent age-related diseases linked with chronic inflammation.

I think the low-carb craze is passing. But know the difference between good carbs, which are digested slowly, and lower-quality choices that are rapidly digested, raise blood sugar, and may promote weight gain. For this year, I'll spotlight six foods to eat more often:

Berries. These small, colorful fruits are loaded with antioxidants that may help protect against cancer and oxidative damage to the eyes, brain, heart, and joints. Berries are easy on calories and brimming with fiber and phytonutrients, and they won't cause spikes in blood sugar, either. Among them, blueberries top the antioxidant charts thanks to their powerful pigments. I prefer organic varieties.

Black cod. Increasingly available in this country, black cod might also be called butterfish or sablefish in restaurants and fish markets. Its velvety and mild-flavored flesh is treasured in Japan. With more omega-3 fats than salmon, black cod is a good food for your heart and has low levels of mercury and PCB contaminants. Smoked sable sold at Jewish or Russian delis is black cod, a fish that can also be broiled, steamed, or grilled in miso (soybean paste). Choose black-cod products from Alaska, where it's a sustainable resource.

Buckwheat. While considered a whole grain, buckwheat is a relative of rhubarb and contains no wheat. A slowly digested carbohydrate that's filled with fiber, buckwheat has an earthy taste. People with wheat allergies or celiac disease can eat buckwheat grits,

groats, and kernels (known as kasha) because they lack gluten. (But products made with buckwheat flour including breads and Japanese soba noodles may also contain wheat flour unless they're labeled gluten free.)

Sweet potatoes. Let these Thanksgiving favorites grace your table year-round. These yellow- and orange-fleshed vegetables earn praise as excellent sources of vitamins A (as carotenoids that preserve eye health) and C, and for their fiber if you eat the skin. A baked one has about 100 calories. Okinawans regularly enjoy purple-fleshed sweet potatoes.

Turmeric. The color and flavor of curries and American mustard come from this yellow-orange spice that's a staple in Indian and Asian cooking. Turmeric is being intensely studied for its anti-inflammatory and cancer-protective effects. With evidence growing for the health benefits of curcumin, turmeric's medically active ingredient, I suggest spicing up your cooking with it now. This spring, I hope to make turmeric tea—a refreshing, unsweetened instant beverage commonly served cold in Okinawa—available here.

Walnuts. These plant-based powerhouses of alpha-linolenic acid (an omega-3 fatty acid) and vitamin E can also supply a sweet and crunchy source of protein and fiber. Whether you snack on a handful, mix into salads and main dishes, or chop them into baked goods, walnuts are versatile and rank as one of the most popular nuts in the world. **SP**

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I was recently asked in a TV interview what one food item I would banish from the earth. My reply was partially hydrogenated oils or trans fats. On New Year's Day, an FDA ruling goes into effect making it mandatory for food manufacturers to list the amount of trans fat on the nutrition label. This doesn't eliminate them from foods. But manufacturers have been reformulating food items to reduce or remove these artery-clogging fats from their products or label them accordingly. There's solid evidence that trans fats increase cardiovascular risk, more so than saturated fat. They may also promote chronic inflammation, accelerate the aging process, and play a role in cancer.

Here's my concern: Under the new rules, a product can claim it has no trans fat, even though the ingredient list includes partially hydrogenated oil or vegetable shortening. The FDA allows products with less than half a gram of trans fat per serving to be considered trans fat free, meaning the amount of trans fat does not have to be listed separately on the nutrition label. I think this will confuse consumers and make them believe a food might be healthier than it is.

I consider anything made with trans fats to be a low-quality food. I make a scrupulous effort to keep them out of my diet by carefully reading food labels, and I encourage you to do the same. I avoid margarine, vegetable shortening, and all products made with them or with partially hydrogenated oils of any kind. Although small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in meat and dairy products, they are insignificant compared to what's found in baked goods, margarine, and packaged and fast foods. Unfortunately, foods served in restaurants are not affected by the FDA ruling.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

self healing

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The Lure of the Labyrinth

After walking a few labyrinths, I recently helped build a circular one next to my garden with some friends. A labyrinth is a single path built with twists and turns to lead a person to a visual center and back out again, forming a design. It's used as a consciousness-focusing device that evokes a distinctive meditative state. I find pleasure in the contemplative state that comes with slowly moving through the stone-lined path to reach the center. While there's been no formal research, some people claim that a labyrinth can affect the energy of a place. Most find walking one to be healing, both emotionally and physically. I think a labyrinth can be particularly helpful if you're feeling confused, restless, or have questions you are wrestling with. In any case, it's a good excuse to walk and relax.

Unlike a maze, which is built to confuse and mislead the walker, a labyrinth has a visible center and guides you along only one predetermined path. There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. You can go it alone

or with others, fast or slow. Some people use the walk as a time of quiet reflection, while others may pray, repeat a phrase or mantra, or focus on a question that needs an answer.

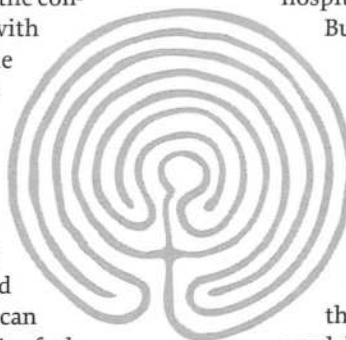
I've noticed more labyrinths being constructed in the United States over the last few years—at retreat centers, churches, colleges, hospitals, spas, and private homes.

But I don't consider them a trend:

Labyrinths date back to ancient Greece and Egypt. The designs vary, but all are based on "sacred geometry," patterns that focus energy. Mine is modeled after the labyrinth that's on the floor of France's Chartres Cathedral built in the twelfth century, a commonly used design. A much simpler option is the finger labyrinth, a miniature version drawn on a piece of paper or computer that you trace slowly with your finger. 

To locate a labyrinth, visit labyrinthsociety.org. A good book on the subject is *Walking a Sacred Path* by Lauren Artress (Riverhead, 1996).

Art by Lee Robinson, courtesy of Hollyhock Retreat Centre



Calming Irritable Bowel

It's little wonder that there have been few celebrity spokespersons for irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS. (One is actress Cybill Shepherd, who has talked publicly about her own experience with the disorder.) The symptoms, including abdominal pain or discomfort, bloating, gas, frequent diarrhea or constipation, or alternating bouts of both, can be sources of embarrassment—so much so that although IBS affects about 15 percent of US adults, most of them haven't sought medical attention. The cause of the condition remains unknown, but researchers suspect it results from a malfunction in nervous-system regulation of the gut or from a previous intestinal infection. Inflammation at the microscopic level in the gut may also play a role.

Conventional physicians often recommend bulk-forming agents (Metamucil, Citrucel) and prescribe medications like antispasmodics, antidiarrheals, low-dose antidepressants, and newer drugs like Zelnorm and Lotronex to treat IBS. Yet, I find that most people get excellent relief from dietary changes, mind-body methods, and certain supplements—without the side effects of drugs. Here are my recommendations, with help from David Kiefer, MD, a family practitioner on faculty at both the University of Washington School of Medicine and Bastyr University who treats many IBS patients.

Dietary measures. Most people with IBS say their symptoms worsen after eating certain foods. Keeping a food diary can help you pinpoint what may be bothering you. In one recent study, IBS patients tended to have higher levels of antibodies that indicate they are more sensitive to wheat, beef, pork, lamb, and soybeans (*American Journal of Gastroenterology*, July 2005). Other possible triggers include caffeine, alcohol, dairy products, fatty foods, fructose, and the non-nutritive sweeteners sorbitol and xylitol. I would avoid products containing carrageenan, a common food additive linked to intestinal ulcerations in animal studies. Because overeating can set off IBS symptoms, try eating smaller, more frequent meals. A high-fiber diet can ease constipation, though it may worsen diarrhea. Always drink enough water to stay well hydrated.

Relaxation techniques. Stress doesn't cause IBS, but it can trigger or exacerbate symptoms. I often recommend breathing techniques, such as the Relaxing Breath described in my books and recordings. Meditation is another option: In small studies, IBS patients who meditated regularly had improvements in symptoms like abdominal pain, diarrhea, gas, and bloating. Or you can take up yoga: Men with diarrhea-predominant IBS who practiced yoga and breathing techniques for two months had fewer bowel symptoms and less anxiety (*Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, March 2004).

Hypnotherapy. In a British study, almost three-quarters of the IBS patients who attended 12 weekly hypnotherapy sessions and received an audiotape to use at home reported an improvement in symptoms. Of those who benefited, 81 percent *maintained* the improvement even more than five years later; most of those who reaped long-term benefits continued to practice self-hypnosis (*Gut*, November 2003). Hypnotherapy can give patients more control over the muscle activity of the

GI tract and the gut's sensitivity to stress and other influences. To locate a hypnotherapist, visit asch.net. Or consider listening to the self-hypnosis recording for IBS by psychologist Steven Gurgevich, PhD. To order, visit tranceformation.com.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy. There is mounting evidence that this form of psychotherapy, which helps patients identify self-defeating thoughts and develop positive coping skills, can reduce IBS symptoms. What's more, brain scans suggest that cognitive-behavioral therapy enables patients to dampen the activity of brain structures involved in processing pain signals and negative emotions that can aggravate symptoms. To find a therapist, visit nacht.org or aabt.org.

Supplements. Try one of these at a time to see what it can do for you, then experiment with combinations if you like.

- **Probiotics.** People with IBS may have altered levels of certain bacteria in the gut. Taking probiotic supplements containing “friendly” bacteria can promote a healthier balance within the intestines. In a study presented at a scientific meeting last October, daily use of a probiotic strain that's called *B. infantis* 35624 helped to normalize bowel habits in women with IBS, benefiting constipated patients and those with diarrhea. I hope the study holds up to peer review for publication; this strain may be available in stores this year. Alternatively, some IBS patients report good results from taking products that contain *Lactobacillus* GG, like Culturelle.

- **Peppermint oil.** Eight out of 12 placebo-controlled studies of peppermint oil showed a significant improvement in IBS symptoms, according to a review article (*Phytomedicine*, August 2005). Peppermint oil can reduce muscle spasms or cramping, and is best used for abdominal pain and discomfort. Take one or two enteric-coated capsules three times a day between meals (these pass through the stomach and dissolve in the lower intestinal tract, where you want them to work).

- **Turmeric.** In a pilot study, people who took a standardized extract of this spice for eight weeks reduced their IBS symptoms by 50 percent or more (*Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, December 2004). Turmeric may help by reducing inflammation and abnormal muscle contractions in the bowel. I suggest taking 300 to 400 mg of turmeric up to three times a day. One reliable product is Turmericforce from New Chapter.

Exercise. Physical activity stimulates normal contractions of the intestines and relieves stress. A study of nearly 1,000 obese and overweight people found that those who incorporated some form of physical activity into their routine had fewer IBS symptoms (*Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, October 2005). Aim for 30 to 45 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, like brisk walking, at least five days a week. More vigorous forms of exercise, like running, may aggravate diarrhea.

Chinese medicine. In a 1998 study, IBS patients who took a standard or individualized Chinese herbal formula for 16 weeks had a significant improvement in their symptoms. University of Maryland scientists recently received a grant for almost \$4 million from the National Institutes of Health to study the effectiveness of acupuncture and Chinese herbs for the disorder. To find practitioners of acupuncture and Chinese herbology, visit nccaom.org. 

For more on IBS, visit HealingDigestiveDisorders.org.

Practical Steps to Preserve Your Memory

One of people's greatest fears about getting older is that they'll lose their memory. This was confirmed by a recent poll of 1,000 US adults, in which 69 percent expressed concern about losing mental abilities as they age. (The top concern, losing one's health, was mentioned by 73 percent.) Scientists had long regarded cognitive decline as an inevitable part of aging, but I'm pleased this view is changing as more studies show that you can take steps to preserve your memory and keep your mind sharp throughout life.

Exercising your mind appears to be a key protective strategy. The more education you have, the less likely you are to experience age-related cognitive decline or develop Alzheimer's disease; if you do get them, they will appear later in life than in people with fewer years of education. The reason may have to do with "neural redundancy," the number of extra connections between nerve cells in the brain. Learning creates new connections between brain cells, and many of these connections duplicate existing pathways. The more connections you have, the more you can afford to lose if some degenerative process should occur.

You don't need to have an advanced educational degree in order to benefit. The important thing is to keep challenging your mind. I've long recommended card games and word puzzles as worthwhile pastimes to sharpen your wits. Other possibilities include doing challenging reading, joining a book group, playing a musical instrument, traveling to new destinations, volunteering, and taking classes. But the best mental workouts I can think of are learning a new computer operating system or a new language. One intriguing study suggests that being bilingual can help protect against age-related cognitive decline (*Psychology and Aging*, June 2004).

5 Memory-Boosting Techniques

An excellent way to sharpen your recall is to learn memory-improvement techniques. In a study of some 2,800 elderly people, those who received 10 brain-training lessons over five to six weeks had significant improvements in memory, concentration, and problem-solving skills. Plus, these improvements lasted for at least two years after the training (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 13, 2002).

Here are five techniques—suitable for people of any age—that are similar to those taught in the above study. The first two are general strategies that can be used to remember many types of information, while the other three can help with specific tasks, like recalling lists. Many of the examples are from Dr. Zaldy Tan's book, *Age-Proof Your Mind* (Warner, 2005).

Visualization. Create a mental picture of what you want to remember. For instance, to help you recall that you parked in the garage area marked 4B, you could visualize four bees buzzing around your car.

Association. Combine two or more things you want to remember in a meaningful way. To not forget to pick up soy milk and two pounds of salmon on your way home, you could imagine opening your car's trunk and finding it filled with

Boot Camp for Your Brain

A comprehensive lifestyle program may have rapid benefits for brain health. In a pilot study of 17 people aged 35 to 70 with mild memory complaints, some were assigned to a two-week regimen that combined memory training, physical activity, relaxation techniques, and a healthy diet, while the others were asked to continue their usual routine. Brain scans before and after the "brain boot camp" found that program participants developed more efficient brain-cell activity in a front portion of the brain that controls everyday memory tasks or "working memory." They were also less forgetful and scored slightly better on memory tests. The 14-day plan, created by University of California, Los Angeles neuroscientist Gary Small, MD, is detailed in his book *The Memory Prescription* (Hyperion, 2005).

the beverage, with a two-pound salmon swimming in it. Researchers say that associations involving movement (the fish swimming in the milk) tend to be more memorable.

Method of loci. Devised by the ancient Greeks, this technique is useful for remembering lists. To do it, you imagine traveling a familiar route, along which the items to be remembered are mentally placed. Say your "memory route" is the subway stops along your evening commute, located at the hospital, the art museum, and the university, and your to-do list includes doing laundry, buying stamps, and returning a library book. You could visualize trucks picking up laundry from the hospital, a sign at the museum for an exhibit of rare stamps, and the university green strewn with books.

Name-face recall. Connect a prominent feature of a person's face (like a small nose or large ears) with their name. For instance, if Mrs. Beatty has full lips, you could imagine the actor Warren Beatty kissing her lips.

Chunking. Whenever you try to remember a phone number or an important date by breaking it up into smaller, more manageable "chunks," you are already practicing this technique. But you can also associate each chunk of numbers with something meaningful for easier recall. To remember the ATM code 8374, you could link the chunk 83 with the age at which your grandmother died and 74 with the year your favorite cousin was born.

Other Ways to Keep Your Mind Sharp

Exercising your mind isn't the only way to protect against age-related memory loss. For instance, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and possibly depression are linked with a greater risk of cognitive decline—one more reason to work with your physician to get these conditions under control.

Here are five other strategies that I recommend:

Be active. A study of some 18,000 women aged 70 years and older found that those who walked at a leisurely pace for two to three hours a week did much better on tests of memory and thinking ability than inactive women. Meanwhile, women who walked at least six hours a week had the cognitive functioning of someone three years younger than their actual age (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 22, 2004). Exercise increases blood flow to the brain and may spur the formation of new brain cells.

Eat right. People who eat plenty of fish, leafy greens, and monounsaturated fats such as olive oil experience less cognitive decline, while those who load up on saturated and trans fats are at increased risk. Because inflammation and oxidative stress can undermine brain function, your best bet is to eat an anti-inflammatory diet that's rich in antioxidants (from fruits and vegetables) and omega-3 fatty acids (from oily fish, ground flax seeds, and walnuts).

Neutralize stress. The stress hormone cortisol is toxic to nerve cells in the part of the brain (the hippocampus) concerned with memory. Relaxation techniques such as breath work, meditation, and yoga can help keep stress—and cortisol—in check. An interesting new study found that brain

regions involved in memory and attention were thicker in people who meditated regularly. These areas tend to shrink with age, but the older meditators were able to ward off some of this shrinkage (*NeuroReport*, November 28, 2005).

Stay connected. Middle-aged and older adults with large social networks experience less cognitive decline as they age. People with an active social life may be more likely to stay involved in mentally challenging activities, and good social ties can be a powerful buffer against stress.

Take supplements. In addition to getting antioxidants from your diet, I recommend taking a daily antioxidant regimen that includes vitamins C and E, selenium, and mixed carotenoids. I also advise that everyone supplement with B vitamins (take a B-50 B-complex supplement or a multivitamin) to help lower blood levels of homocysteine; high levels of this amino acid are associated with lower cognitive functioning. If you aren't getting plenty of omega-3s in your diet, consider supplementing with them; one type of omega-3, DHA, is essential for normal brain function. Some people report cognitive benefits from "smart" supplements such as ginkgo, acetyl-L-carnitine, and phosphatidylserine; for a detailed discussion of these products, see my new book, *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005). 

Echinacea: Can It Stop a Cold?

Recent research and media reports that claim echinacea is ineffective for treating colds have confused millions of people who use the herb. Although scientific evidence is mixed, I've found that echinacea is beneficial at the onset of a cold to lessen its severity and length. However, I do not think it helps *prevent* colds or flu.

Criticism of echinacea garnered speed after the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) published a study in July 2005 involving nearly 400 college students exposed to a cold virus. Those who took any of three preparations of *Echinacea angustifolia* before or at the time of exposure had similarly severe symptoms, just as much virus in their bodies, and no higher levels of an immune-boosting protein than those who took a placebo.

This study was well designed, but I agree with experts who say that a higher dose than the 900 mg of echinacea used daily may be more beneficial, and that testing a different type of echinacea and various age groups might yield different results. I look

forward to future studies and am pleased that the National Institutes of Health, which funded the NEJM trial, is planning to support additional echinacea research.

Knowing whether echinacea is effective for colds is further complicated because different types and doses of the herb have been used in studies and given at different stages of a cold's development, making it hard to compare results. There are three major species (*E. purpurea*, *E. angustifolia*, and *E. pallida*) and different parts of the plant, including the roots, stems, and leaves, are used for medicinal purposes.

A recent study looked at nearly 130 people aged 18 to 65 who took *E. purpurea* at the onset of a cold for one week. They were treated with either 40 ml of a liquid extract or placebo for the first day and 16 ml daily for the next six. People who took echinacea reported significantly milder symptoms and a faster recovery than those who didn't (*Journal of Clinical Pharmacy & Therapeutics*, February 2004). Earlier studies in Europe,

where there has been more extensive research on the herb, have come to a similar conclusion—that echinacea will not *prevent* colds, but may lessen their duration and intensity. And laboratory studies in mice and test tubes suggest that echinacea may boost the immune system and dampen inflammation, benefits that may limit your time nursing a cold.

How to take. Echinacea is most commonly available in tinctures, capsules, and tablets. I prefer *E. angustifolia* root or *E. purpurea* herb, both in tincture form, because they have yielded the best results. Find products prepared with an alcohol base—they tend to be stronger and stay fresher longer. I take one teaspoon four times a day at the first sign of cold symptoms. Children under 10 can take half that dose in water or juice four times a day. Although there are no known drug interactions with echinacea, be cautious if you are allergic to marigold, chamomile, and other species of the daisy family. (For more on cold and flu prevention, see the November 2004 issue.) 

Ask Dr. Weil Myofascial Release; Neuropathy; and More

Is IV glutathione helpful for Parkinson's patients?

I think receiving glutathione intravenously is safe for Parkinson's disease (PD) patients and can have benefits. But since I have no firsthand experience with it and there's been little research, I asked neurologist David Perlmutter, MD, who has pioneered this treatment for nearly a decade in his Naples, Florida, clinic after learning about it from an Italian study. Dr. Perlmutter, who wrote *The Better Brain Book* (Riverhead, 2005), explains that glutathione is a powerful antioxidant (not a drug) that's been found to be deficient in the brains of PD patients. Glutathione helps to protect brain tissue from free-radical damage, which can destroy cells in the mid-brain so that it produces less dopamine; this can cause PD symptoms, such as tremors and stiffness.

While the drug L-dopa (sold as Sinemet) only helps to treat PD symptoms, IV glutathione seems to treat the underlying disease by slowing damage to the brain, says Dr. Perlmutter. He's noticed that when patients receive a dose of up to 2,000 mg of IV glutathione three times a week in addition to taking their medications, they show less rigidity as well as improvement in their tremors and mobility. He finds that those who continue with glutathione may eventually reduce or stop their drugs and that side effects are rare. He points out that oral glutathione supplements are not as effective or as well absorbed. (IV doses should initially be given by a trained health professional who can be found through acam.org or by calling 888-439-6891.) We'll learn more about IV glutathione for PD this year when results from the first American trial are expected to be released.

What do you think of myofascial release work?

There is not much research on this technique, but I think it's a good form of bodywork. Developed by a physical therapist in the 1970s, myofascial release aims to release tension and pressure in the fascia, the connective tissue that surrounds all muscles, bones, nerves, blood vessels, and organs. This tension can be caused by poor posture, injury, illness, or emotional stress. Practitioners use their fingers, palms, elbows, and forearms to locate tight areas in the body, and then *gently* stretch those tissues until a "softening" is felt. Stretches are slow and long, sometimes lasting up to five minutes each. Patients may experience physical as well as emotional release; experts say that pent-up feelings and memories are also discharged as a result of treatment.

Myofascial release sessions are usually 30 to 90 minutes long and may cost from \$50 to over \$125. (Check to see if your health insurance covers them.) Fibromyalgia and other forms of chronic pain may require long-term treatment, but a few visits may be all you need for sports injuries, recurring headaches, tight muscles in the back, neck, or jaw, and other stress-related problems. Myofascial release practitioners may be massage or physical therapists, osteopathic physicians, and other trained bodyworkers, such as Rolfers.

Do you know any alternative treatments for chemotherapy-induced neuropathy?

There are natural approaches for the damage to the peripheral nerves, known as neuropathy, which often occurs as a side effect of some chemotherapy drugs. This usually temporary nerve damage may cause numbness, tingling, and burning pain in the hands and feet, or a loss of balance and reflexes.

Acupuncture and reflexology may relieve pain, and supplements may help damaged nerves to recover. Research shows that alpha-lipoic acid (ALA), an antioxidant that neutralizes free radicals and protects blood flow to the nerves, can speed the healing process. But do not use ALA during chemotherapy because it may interfere with treatment. Scientists are currently studying ALA for chemotherapy-induced neuropathy, and past research has found the supplement beneficial for diabetic neuropathy. After chemotherapy is finished, I suggest starting with 100 mg of ALA twice a day. You can slowly increase the dose to 300 mg twice a day over the next month. And since B vitamins are important for nerve function, I also recommend a daily B-50 B-complex supplement.

What should I use instead of artificial air fresheners?

I'm glad that you want to avoid artificial air fresheners, since they can be respiratory irritants for some people and many of them contain chemicals that may act as carcinogens when inhaled. Natural air fresheners are available at health food stores, but simple things like fresh flowers, sachets, essential oils, and orange peels floating in a bowl of white vinegar can cover up or absorb bad odors indoors. Plus, houseplants might help clean the air. English ivy, an enemy to many gardeners because of its rapid growth outdoors, may benefit people indoors who are sensitive to airborne irritants, according to a recent study. Be careful not to overwater houseplants since they can become breeding grounds for mold.

Why do you caution about eating whole-wheat products in your new book? I thought they were good for nutrition.

In my opinion, there's a relatively small difference between white flour and whole-wheat flour from the standpoint of glycemic load, which takes into account the carbohydrate content in a typical serving of a food as well as how fast the body turns that carbohydrate into blood sugar. While the glycemic load of breads made with whole-wheat flour is slightly lower (better) than those made with white, it's not nearly as good as that of products made with whole or cracked grains.

Whole grains and foods made with them contain whole kernels or pieces of them, in which the starch is surrounded by a fibrous coat that acts as a barrier to digestive enzymes. These slow-digesting carbohydrates help to control blood sugar and possibly even weight gain. But in foods made from flours, the starch is pulverized, exposing it to the rapid action of enzymes and quick conversion to blood sugar. It does not

matter whether the pulverized starch is wheat or white; both rapidly convert to blood sugar. For these reasons, I suggest in my new book, *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005), to eat fewer products made with flour of any kind and to eat more whole grains (not whole-wheat-flour products). Whole grains include oats, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, brown and wild rice, and others. When choosing bread, select one with whole or cracked grain (wheat berries) as its first ingredient, and look for visible kernels. Know that terms like multigrain, 100 percent wheat, cracked wheat, and stone ground do *not* mean whole grain.

What do you think of Botox for an overactive bladder?

Before resorting to Botulinum toxin A (Botox) injections for an overactive bladder, a condition that causes a sudden and strong need to urinate, I would experiment first with

acupuncture, Kegel exercises, and lifestyle changes. Although Botox seems to help block nerves from signaling the bladder muscles to contract, the injections are invasive, expensive, and must be repeated about every three to six months.

I'm more comfortable recommending acupuncture, which has been shown to reduce urinary leakage and bathroom visits, perhaps by decreasing nerve stimulation to the bladder. For best results, pair it with relaxation methods and bladder training, which may include creating a schedule for going to the bathroom and also doing Kegel exercises to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor. For detailed instructions, go to http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/exercise_ez, or ask a doctor to show you how to do them. Also, limit your intake of caffeine, which may irritate the bladder, and try reducing the fluids you drink around the time of day that you notice increased urination. **SP**

Health in the News

Decaf May Harm the Heart. Drinking decaffeinated coffee might not be easier on your heart, says a study presented at the American Heart Association's annual scientific sessions. That's because when researchers asked 187 people to drink three to six cups of regular black coffee, decaf, or neither beverage every day for three months, the decaf drinkers had 8 to 18 percent higher levels of a type of blood lipid considered a precursor to LDL ("bad") cholesterol. Although these findings are preliminary, scientists think that the Robusta coffee beans used in decaf to enhance its taste have higher concentrations of fat.

Comment: A daily cup or two of coffee doesn't appear to be harmful to the heart, but higher intakes of caffeinated or decaf might be. I think you're better off drinking tea, which has proven health benefits.

Age Well with Exercise. Moving more can help you live longer, according to a study that followed 5,200 Massachusetts residents aged 50 or older for more than 40 years. Compared to men and women with low levels of physical activity, highly active participants lived more than three years longer, while moderate exercisers lived more than a year longer. Moderate to highly active people also spent an average of one to three years longer without cardiovascular disease. An example of moderate activity was a 30-minute brisk walk five times a week; a half-hour of running five days a week was considered high activity. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, November 14, 2005)

Comment: This is the longest-lasting study on how different levels of activity affect life expectancy. Being physically active has many health benefits, including greater longevity and reduced risk of several chronic diseases.

Healing Arthritic Knees. Two popular arthritis supplements appear helpful for moderate to severe pain from osteoarthritis (OA) in the knee, but not for milder joint pain. In a multi-center trial of nearly 1,600 people with knee OA reported at the American College of Rheumatology's annual meeting, patients were given one of five daily treatments: glucosamine hydrochloride, chondroitin sulfate, glucosamine and chondroitin combined, the drug Celebrex, or placebo. During the 24-week study, taking the supplements wasn't shown effective for pain compared to the placebo, and Celebrex users fared somewhat better than a dummy pill. Only one subgroup with moderate to severe knee OA had significant pain relief from a combination of glucosamine and chondroitin.

Comment: The quality of glucosamine and chondroitin products can vary widely, and I would want to know that the scientists tested reliable forms. I continue to recommend that people with osteoarthritis try these supplements for a two-month period.

Ginseng May Cut Colds. A Canadian study suggests that an extract derived from the roots of American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) may help people who catch frequent colds. In the trial, 323 adults were randomly assigned to take one capsule of the ginseng product, called Cold-FX, or a placebo twice a day for four months. People taking ginseng came down with 25 percent fewer colds, and they cut their chances of catching multiple colds by more than half. The herbal remedy also appeared to reduce the duration and severity of colds. (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*, October 25, 2005)

Comment: American ginseng is considered an adaptogen that boosts general resistance; this study supports that idea. Ginseng is sold in many forms in the United States. Cold-FX, a Canadian product, can be found online. **SP**

The Annual Physical

Has the annual physical exam become as obsolete as the typewriter and rotary telephone? To hear the opinions of several major health organizations, the answer appears to be yes. Such groups as the US Preventive Services Task Force, the American College of Physicians, and the US Public Health Service have stopped recommending yearly checkups for healthy adults at low risk. They say there is not much good evidence that such time-honored practices as listening to your heart and lungs, looking into your throat and ears, and tapping your chest have much benefit in detecting disease or improving outcomes in healthy people.

Instead of the yearly head-to-toe ritual, many professional groups are calling for a more selective approach with fewer tests, a wider interval between exams, and more emphasis on disease prevention. A physician's time, they say, might be best spent offering lifestyle counseling to low-risk patients about better eating, not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and limiting alcohol. The American Medical Association backed away from the annual physical in the 1980s, preferring to leave more up to the physician's discretion including the selection of tests plus the frequency and timing of checkups.

Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Exams

With change in mind, perhaps the annual physical needs a different name? Many managed care organizations already call it a "preventive care exam" or "well-patient office visit." Some Arizona doctors have proposed the term "periodic health examination," to suggest it not occur yearly and be tailored to the age, sex, and health risks of each individual. And an individualized approach with some routine testing might be better for healthy people than a one-size-fits-all strategy in which a battery of standard tests are done yearly. Although much about the yearly physical is debatable, one thing is clear: Laboratories, health insurers, and some medical practices benefit from the business.

If the idea of the annual checkup seems outdated among health organizations, this news might not have reached physicians and the public. The annual physical seems to be alive and well and is perceived as valuable, according to a recent survey of nearly 800 primary care physicians. Seventy-four percent of these doctors believed checkups improve detection of disease, while 65 percent agreed they were necessary (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, June 27, 2005). Previously, these same researchers questioned roughly 1,200 patients in three

major cities by telephone. Most respondents felt a comprehensive yearly exam was necessary, but when a subset of this group was asked about the need for specific tests like chest X-rays, urinalysis, and blood sugar, their interest in them was initially enthusiastic but declined substantially if they were footing the bill (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, May 7, 2002).

Voices from Integrative Medicine

In my opinion, it's hard to make sweeping generalizations about the annual physical because it's a personal decision and there are few clear standards. I think it offers reassurance to patients who worry and is of low risk to them. For physicians, it's a chance to pick something up that may not be causing symptoms and discuss good health practices. While some patients consider yearly checkups a nuisance or to have little merit, I know many business leaders who are eager to get yearly executive physicals. Although some physicians might advise an annual physical after age 50, my sense—based on patterns of chronic illness—is that it can begin after 60 for people at low risk who are taking good care of themselves. (This advice doesn't apply to a woman's yearly gynecological exam nor does it hold true for those at higher risk or with strong family histories of disease.)

My colleague David Rakel, MD, director of the University of Wisconsin Integrative Medicine in Madison and a graduate fellow of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine (PIM), is an advocate for these face-to-face meetings. He says the benefits of the yearly physical may be found in areas that the research has not studied. He suggests that their chief focus should not be on looking for the cause of disease but on supporting and creating health. He considers a yearly checkup a time to get to know his patients better, beyond their symptoms or diseases. It's his chance to develop trust, establish continuity, and offer time to build a foundation for relationship-centered care. For his patients, it creates time to make a reinvestment in their own health, by getting appropriate screenings or advice on how to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Echoing the call for building and bettering relationships between patients and physicians is Russell Greenfield, MD, medical director of Carolinas Integrative Health in Charlotte, North Carolina, and another PIM alum. "I don't think most people view the physical exam as necessary for good health as much as they consider it a prudent annual activity," says Dr. Greenfield. "If done well, they can re-emphasize health-promoting behaviors." He points out that while a clean bill of health at one exam does not guarantee future health, there is the occasional person for whom an annual exam proves very important, maybe even lifesaving. 

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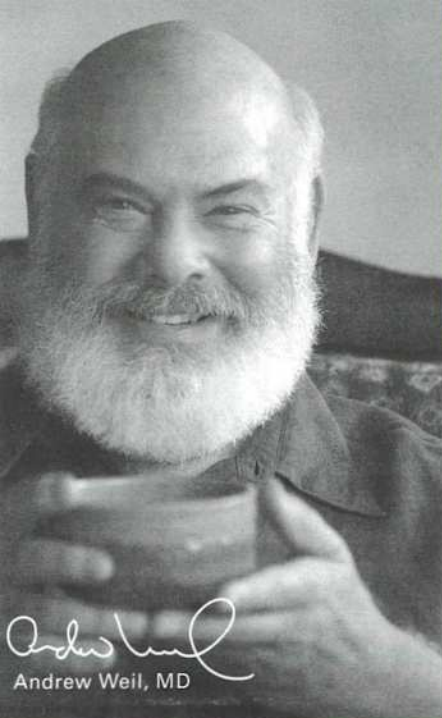
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FEBRUARY 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

The Healing Power of Touch

Touch—whether it's holding hands, petting the dog, or getting a back rub—can influence our physical and emotional health. Because skin is our largest and perhaps most sensitive organ, it provides us with ample opportunity to reap the benefits of touch. Studies on touch suggest it may reduce stress, ease arthritis pain, increase airflow in asthmatics, and improve immune function. Other research shows that babies who receive little physical affection develop abnormally. In a touch-deprived culture like ours, I encourage people of all ages to find ways to touch and be touched.

Touching is an easy connection to make because it feels so good. I hug my friends as often as possible and urge you to become comfortable doing so. Tools like handheld massagers can't replicate the human interaction, so give a massage or get one, dance with a partner, and create social connections that are physically and emotionally meaningful. In addition to everyday interactions, there are many different touch therapies to choose from. Hands-on approaches such as Reiki and reflexology influence the flow of energy throughout the body, while manipulative techniques, like chiropractic care and massage therapy, affect body structure.

Many benefits of touch are attributed to a reduction in cortisol, a stress hormone produced by the adrenal gland. Scientists have also observed changes in heart rate and blood pressure after touching certain points on the body and noted changes in brain chemicals thought to affect stress and pain.

Although studies have focused on touch therapy rather than everyday touch, the science likely applies to both. In recent studies, massage at moderate pressure was effective in lowering cortisol levels, while light pressure showed no effect. This may explain why people prefer a firm handshake, says Tiffany Field, MD, lead researcher and director of the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine.

Dr. Field is looking for the mechanism behind reactions to touch. "We did research with HIV and breast cancer patients and were very surprised that touch had a positive effect on the immune system. When we looked at the underlying cause, we found that touch decreased cortisol levels," says Dr. Field. "We know cortisol kills natural killer cells, the front line of defense in the immune system. Now it doesn't seem so surprising."

Giving touch can be even more beneficial than getting it. A study found that the psychological effects of a massage were greater when volunteer grandparents gave a massage to an infant than when they received one. Other studies involving parents of children with chronic conditions found that the parents reduced their own stress levels by giving their children massages.

The social consequences of our aversion to touch may be far-reaching. Dr. Field thinks there's a correlation between no-touch school policies created in the 1980s, which are still in effect, and an increase in youth violence. "When baby animals are restrained from touch, they become violent," says Dr. Field.

I agree with Dr. Field that our society has yet to truly evaluate the effects of a lack of touch. But I'm glad that massage therapy is becoming more popular, and I'm curious to see whether aging baby boomers will change our cultural bias against the elderly, who are the largest untouched population.

ON MY MIND

Mâche

I learned about mâche (pronounced "moh") 15 years ago, long before it became a trendy green here. I found it in a seed catalog, decided to grow it in my garden, and immediately loved it. Now that it's more widely available, you should get to know mâche and put it in your salad bowl.

What it is: Also known as lamb's lettuce (its spoon-shaped leaves are said to resemble a lamb's tongue), corn salad, and doucette, mâche is slow-growing, forming rosettes of leaves. It's often sold in bagged salad mixes and is somewhat pricey because its delicate leaves require more care during harvesting. This tender leafy green is rich in vitamins A and C, folate, and potassium.

Why try? Mâche, from the French verb meaning "to chew," has a soft, velvety texture and a sweet, nutty taste. Grown in France for centuries, it's recently been cultivated commercially in the United States. You can add it to soup or cook it like spinach. I like mâche best raw with a walnut oil vinaigrette.

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Would you believe me if I told you that there's a cost-effective way to improve the health, academic performance, and behavioral problems of our nation's children? I think such benefits could be reaped if the federal government were to supply a daily vitamin and mineral supplement to every student in grades K to 12. Kids could receive it in their homerooms or at lunchtime.

One advantage of providing dietary supplements would be to correct micronutrient deficiencies, which are particularly common in children of poor families. Inadequate intake of vitamins and minerals makes kids more vulnerable to colds and flu and may increase the risk of developing heart disease and cancer later in life. Supplements would also provide nutritional insurance for the 80 percent of children who don't eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

As for learning ability, 10 of 13 studies examined in a review article showed that taking multivitamin/mineral pills raised nonverbal IQ scores in children aged six to 16 with nutrient-deficient diets (*Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, June 2001). And preliminary evidence suggests vitamin and mineral deficiencies may play a role in behavioral problems ranging from limited attention spans and hyperactivity to aggression and depression.

I hope that a grassroots lobbying effort will spring up around the idea of providing a daily multivitamin to all schoolkids. Because children can't vote and don't fill politicians' campaign chests, they need adults to advocate on their behalf. Consider contacting your elected officials and asking them to support legislation that would make this low-cost/high-impact idea a reality.

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Andrew Weil, MD

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Healing with Help from a Horse

It's called hippotherapy, and yet this treatment does not involve a huge African mammal. This hippo comes from the Greek word for horse. At some 700 riding centers in North America (see narha.org for locations), therapy with horses offers a unique form of rehabilitation for conditions where conventional medicine doesn't always have much to offer. Children with a range of disabilities—from cerebral palsy (CP) and autism to neurological disorders and developmental delays—can benefit, as may adults recovering from stroke or with multiple sclerosis.

How can a horse help with treatment? Its gait provides a similar rhythmic and repetitive movement to the leg motions people use for walking. When a child with CP, for example, sits on a therapy horse, her hips and pelvis loosen up from the animal's movement and leg muscles stretch, strengthen, and are stimulated in ways not easily replicated by physical therapy equipment. Besides working the lower body, the rider must control posture in the upper body to stay astride the horse. This helps retrain the brain and nervous system to improve balance and coordination. Equine-assisted therapy is fun for the

participant, boosts self-confidence, and also encourages a connection with an animal.

I think many physicians don't realize this is a formal therapy with trained practitioners, who are often physical, occupational, or speech therapists. Therapists individualize treatment for the disability and set specific rehabilitative goals. During a typical hour-long session that costs \$50 to \$120 and may occur weekly, both horse and rider are guided through a series of exercises. The therapist leads the horse around an indoor ring with assistance from one or two sidewalkers, who support and supervise the rider. Instead of a leather saddle, a fleece pad or sheepskin bolster with gripping handles is used. This ensures closer contact with the horse and helps the rider to feel the animal's motion, while warming muscles so they relax.

While studies showing hippotherapy's effectiveness have been limited in number, William Benda, MD, a Program in Integrative Medicine graduate Fellow who conducted one such trial, tells me that because the participants are highly motivated to cooperate with treatment, it often works as well as or better than conventional approaches. 

Diet and Hypertension

Diet can make a difference to high blood pressure. It's one of several lifestyle approaches—including not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, getting moderate exercise, and practicing relaxation techniques—that can help reduce blood pressure or keep it in check. That's good news since blood pressure rises with age: People over 55 have a 90 percent chance of developing hypertension, which raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney damage. But lifestyle changes might tip these odds. In countries where a mostly vegetarian diet is eaten, with little fat, salt, and sugar, blood pressure readings are lower. I'll discuss some other ways that foods and beverages can help control high blood pressure.

DASH. I think the DASH diet or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension is a well-researched eating plan that's been proven to work (see box and nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/). It emphasizes readily available foods, including fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products (you can substitute calcium-fortified soy milk or tofu products for dairy), and it's low in saturated and total fat. These foods are also rich sources of key nutrients thought to be effective in lowering blood pressure: The minerals calcium, potassium, and magnesium as well as fiber are all believed to influence hypertension, although their exact roles in this process aren't clear.

The first DASH trial involved 459 adults, who were given one of three diets for eight weeks: The control group received a "typical American diet," another ate this diet but with more fruits and vegetables, and a third followed the DASH plan. Hypertensive people on the DASH diet had the greatest reductions in blood pressure, with systolic pressure (the first number in a reading) dropping an average of 11 points and diastolic by 5 points. These reductions are similar to those achieved with blood pressure drugs (*New England Journal of Medicine*, April 17, 1997).

I think people with prehypertension (systolic pressure between 120 and 139, diastolic 80 to 89) or those with Stage 1 hypertension (systolic 140 to 159, diastolic 90 to 99) might bring down blood pressure primarily through diet and lifestyle changes. If on blood pressure medications, lifestyle approaches might help reduce dosages or the number of drugs taken.

Sodium. Roughly half the people with high blood pressure are thought to be salt sensitive, meaning that consuming too much salt can elevate blood pressure while limiting salt might lower it. Researchers investigated whether an eating plan with high levels of sodium (3,300 mg a day), medium levels (2,400 mg), or low levels (1,500 mg) would cause the biggest drop in blood pressure. The greatest reductions were seen in people with high blood pressure on the low-sodium plan, whose systolic pressure fell nearly 12 points after 12 weeks (*New England Journal of Medicine*, January 4, 2001).

Salt might not be a major contributor to hypertension, but most Americans get too much. The latest government recommendations encourage everyone to keep their sodium levels to 1,500 mg a day. To cut back, eat less processed and fast food, use less table salt, and read food labels carefully.

Carbohydrates. The DASH diet is rich in carbohydrates, so one recent study modified its carbohydrate content to learn how this affected heart health. One group ate meals in which 10 percent of the carbohydrate calories were shifted to protein-rich foods like beans and egg whites, another group shifted 10 percent of carbs to monounsaturated fats, like olive or canola oil, while a third followed the standard DASH plan. After six weeks, all three diets cut blood pressure and other heart disease risk factors, yet researchers were surprised to find that both the protein-enhanced and higher-fat versions produced additional reductions in blood pressure among people with hypertension (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 16, 2005). These findings suggest that the DASH diet can be further improved by replacing some carbohydrates with either plant or lean protein or healthier fats.

Other dietary factors. If you're overweight, shedding five to 10 percent of your body weight can ease your heart's workload and lower blood pressure significantly. For every two pounds of weight lost, blood pressure falls 1 point. As for alcohol, one drink a day for women or two for men may protect the heart, but more than this can increase your odds for hypertension. And while the latest study of caffeine consumption found that blood pressure was raised in women who drank the most cola but *not* coffee, I still suggest limiting your coffee, tea, and sodas to get less of this heart stimulant. ☞

DASH Diet at a Glance

This eating plan contains nutrients that reduce hypertension and is now a standard part of treatment guidelines in the United States and abroad.

FOOD GROUP	SERVINGS*	SAMPLE SERVING
Grains	6 daily	one slice bread; 1/2 c cereal, cooked rice or pasta
Vegetables	4 daily	1 c leafy greens; 1/2 c cooked veggies; 3/4 c vegetable juice
Fruits	4 daily	1/2 c fresh, frozen, canned fruit; 1/4 c dried fruit; 3/4 c juice
Low- or non-fat dairy	2 daily	1 c milk or yogurt; 1 1/2 oz cheese; 3 oz tofu
Lean meats, poultry, fish	1 1/2 daily	3 oz cooked
Fats, oils, dressings	1 daily	1 tsp oil or margarine; 1 T salad dressing
Nuts, seeds, beans	1 or 2 a week	1/2 c cooked beans; 1/3 c nuts; 2 T seeds
Sweets	3 a week	1/2 c frozen yogurt

* Based on a 1,400- to 1,800-calorie daily diet. Chart adapted from *The DASH Diet for Hypertension* by Thomas Moore, MD (Pocket, 2003).

Shedding New Light on the Sunshine Vitamin

Last year, I changed my recommendation for vitamin D and began encouraging everyone to supplement with at least 1,000 IU a day, up from the 400 to 800 IU I'd previously advised. I made this change because I had become convinced that people aren't getting enough of this nutrient for optimum health. Since then, evidence has continued to accumulate that vitamin D offers a tremendous variety of health benefits beyond its most well known one, building bones. These helpful effects range from preserving muscle strength and preventing falls to protecting against cancer and autoimmune disease.

Sometimes called the "sunshine vitamin" because your skin produces it when exposed to sunlight, vitamin D is actually a hormone. It's also in some foods, including oily fish (such as salmon and sardines) as well as fortified milk, soy milk, orange juice, and cereals. Vitamin D allows your bones to take up calcium (see box at right), but there are receptors for this hormone all over the body, including the brain, heart, breast, prostate, and immune cells. This helps to explain why vitamin D has such widespread effects.

The body's ability to manufacture vitamin D declines significantly with age, so older people are more likely to be deficient. Also at higher risk are individuals with dark skin (which produces less vitamin D in response to sunlight) and those who live in northern climates and spend winters mainly indoors. Obesity also increases the risk of vitamin D deficiency because it's stored in body fat, making the nutrient less available for use by other tissues.

Benefits Beyond Bone Health

You're probably already aware that vitamin D is helpful for preventing and treating osteoporosis and osteopenia. Here I'll discuss several benefits that are less well known, with help from Walter Willett, MD, chairman of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, who has coauthored numerous studies on the vitamin.

Muscle weakness and falls. Vitamin D deficiency has been linked with muscle weakness, and a study of more than 4,000 adults aged 60 to 90 found that those with higher blood levels of vitamin D had stronger leg muscles and better mobility (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, September 2004). Vitamin D's muscle-strengthening effects may explain why it helps prevent falls: An analysis of five studies concluded that supplementing with vitamin D reduces the risk of falls by more than 20 percent; daily doses of 700 to 800 IU were more protective than 400 IU (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 28, 2004).

Cancer. Vitamin D helps regulate cell growth and may lower the risk of many cancers. A new review of 63 previous studies concludes that taking 1,000 IU of vitamin D a day can cut the risk of colon cancer by 50 percent and also reduce the chances of breast and ovarian cancer by 30 percent (*American Journal of Public Health*, February 2006). Also, a study of men in San Francisco revealed that those with the highest amount

D Is Key to Using Calcium

Vitamin D may be more important than calcium for bone health, suggests a recent study. Researchers in Iceland analyzed levels of parathyroid hormone (PTH), which regulates calcium metabolism, in 944 healthy adults. They found that higher blood levels of vitamin D were more closely associated with normal levels of PTH than a high calcium intake. They concluded that getting more than 800 mg of calcium a day from food and supplements may be unnecessary as long as vitamin D levels are normal (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 9, 2005). To me, this shows that the main issue with calcium is absorbing it and using it, rather than not getting enough in. Vitamin D is the key to absorbing and using calcium.

of sun exposure had half the risk of prostate cancer than those with little sun exposure (*Cancer Research*, June 15, 2005). At least a dozen studies are now under way to test vitamin D's effectiveness at cancer prevention.

There's also evidence that vitamin D may improve the prognosis of cancer patients. In one study, people who had surgery for early-stage lung cancer in the summer (when their production of vitamin D from sunlight would be highest) and also had the highest intake of vitamin D from food and supplements were more than twice as likely to surpass the five-year survival mark as those who had winter surgeries and the lowest intake of vitamin D (*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, October 2005). Other researchers are looking at vitamin D as a potential treatment for prostate cancer.

Cardiovascular health. Blood pressure tends to be higher during the winter and in people living farther from the equator or with dark skin—all of which are associated with lower production of vitamin D from sun exposure. Recent studies in Europe found that elderly people with low blood levels of vitamin D were more likely to have a stroke, and a German study suggests low levels of the nutrient may contribute to the development of congestive heart failure (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, January 1, 2003).

Autoimmune diseases. Vitamin D also helps to regulate immunity. Multiple sclerosis (MS) and other autoimmune disorders—in which immune responses are directed against the body's own tissues—are much less common near the equator, where people get more sunlight and produce more vitamin D. Supplementation also appears to be protective: Women who took at least 400 IU of vitamin D per day were 40 percent less likely to develop MS (*Neurology*, January 13, 2004) and one-third less likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis (*Arthritis & Rheumatism*, January 2004). In other research, infants who were given vitamin D supplements had a lower risk of type 1 diabetes, another autoimmune disorder.

More evidence suggests women with the highest intake of vitamin D from food and supplements (about 700 IU per day) have a 40 percent lower risk of developing PMS than those with the lowest intake (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, June 13, 2005). Higher blood levels of vitamin D were recently linked with better lung function (*Chest*, December 2005) and a lower risk of gum disease (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, September 2005). And an unpublished study suggests that women who get the most vitamin D from food and supplements are 25 percent less likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

Getting Enough Vitamin D

If you can get vitamin D from sunlight and food, why bother with supplements? For one thing, excessive sun exposure can cause skin cancer. Although sunscreen can help protect your skin, it also blocks vitamin D formation. I think it's fine to get moderate sun exposure—10 or 15 minutes without protection a few days a week—in order to boost vitamin D production. But I would still recommend supplementing with 1,000 IU of vitamin D a day as insurance.

As for food, it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone: You'd have to eat two or three servings of salmon

a day or drink 10 glasses of fortified milk to get 1,000 IU of the vitamin. Recently, a bakery in Wisconsin (naturalovens.com) developed a whole-grain bread with 1,000 IU of D per slice and dark chocolates that deliver 2,000 IU per piece, but these highly fortified products are marketed as dietary supplements.

To get at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D from pills, you have a few options. You can take an isolated vitamin D supplement. Or you can take a multivitamin (most contain 400 IU of D) plus a vitamin D supplement to make up the difference. Or women can take a multivitamin plus supplements that combine calcium and vitamin D. (Men are probably better off getting calcium from food, because some research suggests a high intake of calcium may increase prostate cancer risk.)

Look for supplements containing the D3 (cholecalciferol) form of vitamin D, which is better utilized than the D2 (ergocalciferol) form. Because vitamin D is fat soluble, take it with a meal containing some fat to enhance absorption.

Lastly, although cod liver oil (available as a liquid and in gelcaps) is rich in vitamin D, I'm wary of recommending it. Many products are so high in vitamin A that toxic amounts could build up in your system. ☹

For more on vitamin D, visit cholecalciferol-council.com.

Three Acupressure Points Worth Knowing

Mostly by trial and error over thousands of years, Eastern healers discovered pressure points on the body that help relieve physical and mental complaints, a treatment called acupressure. Unlike acupuncture, which involves needles to access these points and a trained practitioner, acupressure uses pressure applied by hands or feet to various parts of the body and you can do it yourself. A good book, teacher, or chart is all that you need to learn the basics. I've used acupressure for nausea caused by motion sickness and know others who use it to ease pain.

Through the body's energy channels, called meridians, acupressure works in two ways: You can stimulate a point in the area where you feel pain or tension, or you can access that area from a different part of the body using points along the meridians. The pressure used varies from person to person and point to point. If you do not feel light pain, you don't have the point or aren't applying enough pressure. If the pain is sharp, you're pressing too hard. "The correct amount

should 'hurt good, not bad' and you should feel a connection in your body," says Michael Reed Gach, PhD, president of the California-based Acupressure Institute (acupressure.com). "When doing acupressure, take slow, deep breaths. Think of the breath as the energy source and the points as the gateways through which the energy flows."

Acupressure research is limited, but there's good evidence that it can reduce stress and nausea after surgery or chemotherapy. And a recent study found self-acupressure applied to points on the legs, feet, hands, and head kept college students alert in class (*Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, August 2005).

The following acupressure techniques are from Gach's book *Acupressure's Potent Points* (Bantam, 1990):

Nausea. Place your right thumb on the inside of your left forearm three finger-widths from the center of your wrist crease. Apply firm pressure with your thumb for a minute, placing your fingertips directly behind your wrist as you take long, deep

breaths. Then place your thumb two finger-widths from your wrist crease and apply pressure for another minute. Do the same to the other wrist.

Sinus pain & congestion. Gently press underneath both cheekbones beside your nose with your middle and index fingers, angling the pressure upward. Breathe deeply as you hold these points for two minutes.

Foot cramps, headaches, & eye fatigue. With bare feet, use your right heel to rub in between the bones on the top of your left foot for one minute. Stimulate the sensitive spots between your big and second toes as well as those between the bones connecting your fourth and little toes. Switch and work on the other foot.

Gach suggests that people see an acupressure practitioner and self-administer, but says either approach works on its own. To find a therapist, visit aobta.org. While many ailments can be relieved within 10 minutes, some chronic conditions, like arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome, may benefit from acupressure a few times a day on an ongoing basis. ☹

Ask Dr. Weil Gerson Therapy; Liquid Vitamins; and More

What do you think of Gerson therapy, a dietary program for treating cancer?

I do not recommend this detoxification diet because it's so cumbersome. You must crush about 20 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each day with a juicer, and then drink one glass of juice every hour for 13 hours. This daily therapy also includes three vegetarian meals and frequent coffee enemas, which have been associated with serious infections and salt and mineral imbalances. The dietary measures and enemas are based on the assumption that intense cleansing of the body boosts the immune system and regenerates the liver, which is supposedly responsible for the removal of cancer cells. Max Gerson, a German physician, originally developed the program in the 1930s to treat his own migraine headaches; he later used it as a treatment for all sorts of diseases, including cancer and tuberculosis.

The commitment required to maintain this dietary program is too much for most people. And there is no scientific evidence to back up its cancer-curing claims. Cancer patients may initially receive Gerson therapy at special clinics (which can cost upwards of \$2,000 for three days) or from a trained practitioner, followed by at least two years of the diet.

My dietary advice for cancer patients and cancer survivors is to eat an anti-inflammatory diet that's rich in omega-3 fatty acids—found in coldwater fish (like salmon), walnuts, and ground flax—and includes lots of fruits and vegetables. Like the Gerson diet, this diet is rich in produce, favors plant protein (yet includes fish), and limits saturated and trans fats.

Our 13-year-old granddaughter had a normal growth cycle for her first nine years. She is not getting any taller now, but had a normal bone scan and blood tests. What's your opinion of human growth hormone for her?

The use of recombinant human growth hormone (rhGH) for children who appear shorter than other youngsters the same age is an accepted but controversial medical treatment. A synthetic version of this hormone is given by injection to the child on a daily basis for several years until the growth plates in the bones fuse and adult height has been achieved. Previously, rhGH was only prescribed for children who had growth hormone deficiency or other metabolic or genetic disorders that prevented normal growth. But in 2003, the Food and Drug Administration expanded its use, approving the drug for the treatment of idiopathic short stature (ISS). This diagnosis is made when height for a child's age and sex falls below the average by more than two standard deviations (or the shortest 1 to 2 percent of children).

It's not clear to me whether your granddaughter meets the criteria for ISS, but I recognize that many families worry when a child is short. As it appears they've done, a pediatrician or endocrinologist will evaluate her height based on bone x-rays to determine her genetic potential (which considers the height of her parents) and her rate of growth, along with

her nutritional and health status, as measured by blood tests. Since her tests were normal, her growth rate will be closely monitored. Some physicians are concerned that parents who want their children to be taller might misuse growth hormone, and this raises medical, ethical, and even financial questions. Short stature is not a disease, and human growth hormone is an expensive treatment that can help achieve height within a broad normal range; still, we don't yet know its potential risks from long-term use.

Are liquid vitamins better than pill forms?

In my opinion, the only real advantage of liquid vitamins is for those who have difficulty swallowing pills, like elderly people or children. Otherwise, I wouldn't recommend them in place of vitamin tablets or capsules as they are typically more expensive and, despite manufacturers' claims, they're not better absorbed or more potent. Vitamin pills might also have a longer shelf life than liquid forms.

Is EDTA chelation safe and will it really clean away plaque and unblock arteries?

For now, I don't think there's evidence to support the use of chelation therapy to treat or reverse coronary artery disease. Results from a large study looking at the safety and effectiveness of EDTA (ethylene diamine tetraacetic acid) chelation in people who've had a heart attack are expected in about two years. Previous findings suggesting that chelation is effective have been from small or poorly designed studies, while other research has shown little benefit.

Chelation is an accepted treatment for heavy metal poisoning. EDTA, a manmade amino acid, is given intravenously, and this chelating agent can latch onto mercury or lead, forming a compound that can help remove these toxins from the blood. Based on similar principles, some alternative practitioners are promoting the use of chelation to treat cardiovascular problems rather than doing angioplasty to unblock clogged arteries or bypass surgery. Patients get weekly intravenous infusions of EDTA, which supposedly binds to calcium within arterial plaque, so the mineral can be excreted in urine, plaque is broken up, and arteries are cleared. But there's not good evidence to substantiate these theories.

Thirty or more weekly chelation sessions may be needed, each lasting two to four hours, making this an expensive and time-consuming treatment. Plus, the patient may be given many supplements, including high doses of antioxidants, which some experts suggest is the main reason why a person may benefit from chelation. The treatment must be administered by a trained health professional and can have side effects ranging from nausea to allergic reactions to seizures. (Oral chelation supplements appear to be a waste of money.) Until more is known, I'd encourage patients with atherosclerosis and circulatory problems to seek out other, proven treatment approaches instead.

I take the iron supplement ferrous sulfate for chronic anemia, but it's hard on my stomach. Are there any alternatives? Is it possible to get enough iron from food?

It may be possible to get enough iron from food, but there are alternatives to ferrous sulfate for iron-deficiency anemia. This type of anemia occurs when the body doesn't have enough iron to make hemoglobin, a substance in red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to cells throughout the body. The result is fatigue, poor work performance, and decreased immunity. Anemia may occur when you lose blood from heavy menstrual bleeding, ulcers, or colon cancer.

Iron supplements are generally best taken and absorbed on an empty stomach, but gastrointestinal side effects such as nausea, vomiting, constipation, and diarrhea may result. I recommend Floradix, an iron supplement that is sold in

liquid form as ferrous gluconate and is suitable for vegetarians. Studies show it has a higher rate of absorption than supplemental iron tablets and fewer side effects. Follow package directions. If you take this supplement with 100 mg of vitamin C, this boosts iron absorption. Also, include iron-rich foods in your diet such as whole grains, beans, leafy greens, molasses, and fish along with foods that will help your body absorb iron, such as fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C. If you take the supplement in divided doses with food and start with half the recommended dose and gradually increase to the full dose, this may also help minimize side effects. Space out your intake of calcium, caffeine, and antacids because they can hinder iron absorption.

In general, I recommend taking iron supplements only when needed for a physician-diagnosed deficiency; otherwise, you increase your risk of iron overload. **SP**

Health in the News

Love Mends Wounds. Time is said to heal all wounds, but new evidence suggests another remedy—arguing less with your spouse. Researchers looked at 42 married couples aged 22 to 77 and placed small blisters on their arms. The twosomes were then asked to talk about changing some quality in their spouse; two months later, they discussed a marital disagreement. The wounds of husbands and wives who had more heated conversations with each other healed at only 60 percent of the rate for those who displayed less hostility. Blood samples also found higher levels of immune system chemicals linked with inflammation and fewer proteins that promote healing. (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, December 2005)

Comment: This study shows how sensitive the immune system is to stress, which can hinder the healing process. It's another good reason to be gentler with loved ones and practice stress-reduction techniques.

Tea Reduces Ovarian Cancer. Women who drank at least two cups of tea (mainly black tea) a day lowered their risk of ovarian cancer by 46 percent compared to those who consumed none, says a recent study. Swedish scientists explored the dietary habits of 61,000 women for roughly 15 years and found that the tea drinkers had fewer cases of ovarian cancer, one of the deadliest cancers in women. Those who drank more tea further reduced their cancer risk. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, December 12–26, 2005)

Comment: Drinking this antioxidant-rich beverage may help protect against several cancers, but this study is the first to suggest a benefit for ovarian forms. It's too early to say whether diet plays a role in ovarian cancer, a malignancy strongly linked with hormonal factors.

Yoga Soothes Back Pain. Doing yoga may reduce backaches and medication use, according to a recent study. Researchers randomly assigned 101 adults with chronic lower back pain to attend a 75-minute yoga session or exercise class weekly or follow a self-treatment book. After 12 weeks, those doing yoga reported greater improvement in back functioning than the others. Three months later, the exercise group had caught up with the yoga group in terms of function, but the yoga group was using half the amount of pain medicine than other participants. (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 20, 2005)

Comment: This is one of the first published studies on yoga for chronic back pain. One explanation for yoga's benefits is its emphasis on the mind-body connection, which can release tension. I believe yoga is a valuable practice and recommend it to ease and *prevent* chronic pain.

Foods Help Preserve Eyesight. Antioxidant supplements have gotten mixed reviews in studies exploring whether they help protect against age-related macular degeneration (AMD), but Dutch scientists have found that antioxidant-rich foods may prevent this progressive eye condition that blurs vision. During an eight-year period, researchers looked at the eating habits of some 5,800 adults aged 55 and over and found that people who had higher dietary intakes of four nutrients—zinc and the antioxidants beta-carotene, vitamins C and E—reduced their odds of AMD by 35 percent. Those consuming below-average amounts increased their AMD risk by 20 percent. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 28, 2005)

Comment: Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and healthy fats are all good antioxidant sources. While I still recommend that adults take antioxidant supplements, this study did not find they affected AMD risk in people with *high* dietary intakes of these nutrients. **SP**

Squeezed to Please: Juice and Your Health

Your juice choices were once fairly limited: orange, grapefruit, apple, and tomato, and for something different or when the need arose, you might go for grape, pineapple, cranberry, or prune. Now the possibilities seem endless. While orange juice remains America's favorite, with apple, grape, and cranberry not far behind, exotic flavors from papaya to passion fruit have gained popularity.

The demand for healthy beverages has prompted juice manufacturers to offer low calorie versions and fortify juices with vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Many juices now include calcium and antioxidant vitamins (A, C, and E) and fiber, and herbs such as ginseng are increasingly being added. As a result, you get more nutrients per glass, but compared to the fruits and vegetables they come from, juices often fall short in fiber and might supply more calories.

Juice can provide important nutrients that count toward your recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables. But it's not a meal replacement. And you need to read labels: Vegetable juice is a great source of phytochemicals, bioflavonoids, and carotenoids, yet many manufacturers add sodium. With fruit juices, check the carbohydrate and calorie content and avoid those called "fruit drink," "cocktail," or "punch" that aren't pure juice and may contain enough sugar or high-fructose corn syrup that they are essentially sugar and water. Stick with 100 percent fruit juices that have little or no added sugar and no artificial flavors or colors, and limit your intake.

Children's overconsumption of fruit juice is leading to numerous problems, from tooth decay to obesity and intestinal distress. For this reason, I recommend that youngsters not drink juice their first year. After that, limit to 6 ounces per day and dilute it with water.

A better option is using a juicer at home. Choose organic ingredients (when possible) and make only what you'll drink that day: Both fruit and vegetable juices tend to oxidize rapidly. I recommend diluting homemade and store-bought juice with plain or sparkling water.

And be wary of health claims: Some juices have legitimate benefits, while marketers make exaggerated claims for others. I'll discuss a few of them.

Cranberry juice. Rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, cranberry juice has long been used to prevent urinary tract infections. Although it's not clear how it wards off infection, the leading theory is that bacteria in the urinary tract attach to one or more compounds in the juice (rather than adhere to the bladder wall) and are flushed out in the urine. Recent research also suggests that drinking the juice can raise HDL ("good")

cholesterol and reduce gum disease risk. Instead of drinking cranberry juice, I recommend diluting cranberry extract (sold at health food stores) with plain or sparkling water.

Grape juice. A recent study found that purple Concord grape juice might provide some of the same cardiovascular benefits as red wine (*Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology*, November 2004). Other research suggests that drinking one or two cups of this antioxidant-rich juice daily may help control LDL ("bad") cholesterol, improve circulation, and reduce blood clots. The downside is that it's high in sugar and calories. White and red grape juices have less antioxidant activity than purple varieties.

Pomegranate juice. This juice, which is easier to consume than the seedy fruit, is extremely high in polyphenols, powerful antioxidants that may be helpful against a wide variety of health concerns from premature aging to certain cancers. Researchers found that pomegranate juice killed human prostate cancer cells in laboratory tests and slowed the progression of prostate cancer in mice (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, October 11, 2005). And in another test-tube study, the juice reduced the effects of stress on blood vessels by stimulating the production of nitric oxide, a chemical thought to keep arteries open and blood flowing (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, March 29, 2005). Lab tests also hint that this juice may help osteoarthritis.

In some instances, juice is being promoted as a means to better health. Loren Israelsen, president of LDI Group, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in dietary supplements and functional foods, calls the focus on juice as a remedy the juice-a-ceutical trend and doesn't expect it to end anytime soon. He points out that the latest health drinks are exotic juices from fruits not sold at the supermarket that purportedly prevent, treat, or cure disease. The most popular juices are still available only by mail and are pricey at \$25 to \$30 for roughly three cups. Xango juice, made from mangosteen fruit, contains antioxidants said to have a long list of health benefits. Other products, such as goji berry juice, sharp and tangy noni juice from the morinda tree, and açai berry juice, are also promoted as having a wide array of healthful actions, from treating cancer to relieving arthritis and encouraging weight loss. Although the antioxidants in these juices are probably beneficial in some way, the health claims being made for them lack sufficient scientific evidence. I think we'll see some research in the next few years, but for now I suggest people not spend their money on these products and simply buy more fruits and vegetables instead. 

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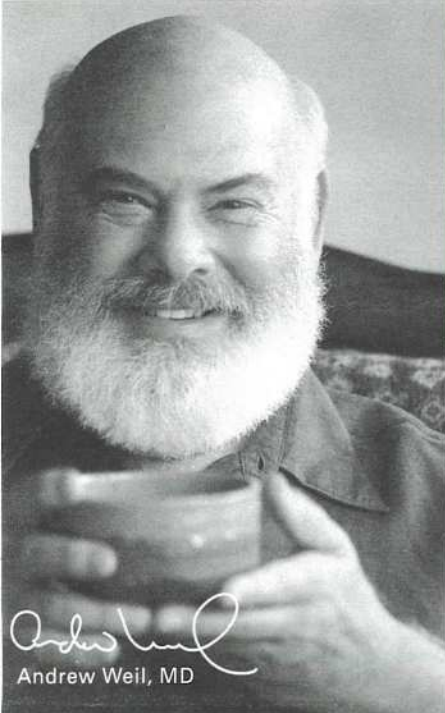
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self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

ON MY MIND

Unchanging Essence

As you get older, the passage of time alters your body and mind in many ways. Aging can bring physical changes to your hair, skin, eyes, hearing, and waistline. And many people worry about possible changes to the brain, about whether they'll lose mental sharpness or become forgetful.

But not everything changes with age. Some part of the self stays the same with time. I call it "unchanging essence" and urge you to focus on it.

Here's one example: When you run into someone you have not seen in decades, you might at first be startled by that person's aged appearance. But as you start to reconnect, you find that on some level they're the same as always. You can again recognize their essential self.

Bottom line. Practice accepting the aging process by discovering those ways in which you are the same as ever. By making you more aware of what in you changes as well as what does not, aging has the potential to catalyze spiritual growth. 

Modify Your Exercise Plan with Age

In traditional cultures, people get enough exercise through the activities of daily living. But we need to find ways to fit in fitness. This can be challenging, especially with the body changes that age brings. Starting in your mid-thirties, you are likely to lose bone mass and about one-third pound of muscle each year while gaining about a pound of fat. And you might feel stiffer, slower, or less resilient. It's best to adapt your exercise routine for your changing body. I recently spoke with Dan Bornstein, my personal trainer, about practical ways to tweak your fitness program as you get older.

Add variety and adjust intensity. The amount of exercise that you need shouldn't change over time, but its intensity and type should vary. Throughout life, get aerobic activity at least five days a week for 30 to 45 minutes, strength training two or three times a week, and flexibility and balance training several times a week. A mistake I often see is that people don't modify their exercise routine as they age and end up getting hurt.

Joints, especially knees, are often abused. It's better to balance harder workouts with sessions that are gentler on joints and to work different muscle groups for ample recovery time. Or switch to walking, cycling, or swimming at midlife instead of sticking with kickboxing, running, or other strenuous activities.

Stay flexible and steady. Across all age groups, most people don't spend enough time on flexibility and balance training, says Bornstein. Yet, these activities help make movements easier and can also be important in preventing falls later in life. As you age, your tendons (the tissues connecting muscle to bone) begin to shorten and tighten, gradually restricting flexibility. Age-related loss of balance has been linked to the death of nerves in the cerebellum, the brain's command center for movement. Exercise activates these nerves, which scientists believe keeps them going. Yoga and Pilates are popular ways to improve balance and loosen tight muscles.

These approaches stretch and strengthen core muscles deep in the midsection that support the spine, affect posture, and might contribute to back pain when they're out of shape. And they add a mind-body dimension to your workout: You'll become more connected to your body and its movements while you're learning breathing techniques to help relax all day long. This is also true for tai chi, which is good for maintaining balance.

Preserve bone and muscle. To avoid loss of bone mineral density, which can put you at greater risk of fractures and disability later in life, you need to build up enough bone mass early on. You can maintain bone through strength training, with either free weights or resistance machines, and weight-bearing exercises (exercising against gravity) such as walking, tennis, and hiking for the hips and spine. (Maximum bone mass is reached around age 35 and may decline rapidly in women after menopause.) Strength training also helps prevent the muscle loss and fat gain commonly seen with aging.

At any age, learn to listen to your body and respect its wisdom. If your knees hurt from running, swim or ride the stationary bike instead. Bornstein notes that exercise should be a lifelong process of experimentation: Try ballroom dancing, water aerobics, or snowshoeing. With care, you can enjoy fun activities that support your changing fitness needs and interests throughout life. 

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When I first moved to the Southwest in the early 1970s, I learned about the importance of the chia plant (*Salvia hispanica*) in traditional Native American diets. The small, grayish seeds of this member of the mint family were eaten as a grain alone or mixed with other seeds. They were also ground and mixed with water to make a nutritious beverage, ground into flour, and included in medicines. Plus, chia was valued as an energy source on long journeys (the word *chia* comes from a Mayan word meaning "strength"). But the plant was nearly wiped out by the Spanish Conquistadores, who condemned it because Indians used the seeds in "pagan" rituals.

Today, most people know of this plant only as the "hair" that sprouts on Chia Pets. But I'm pleased that chia is getting increasing attention as a source of omega-3 fatty acids. In fact, chia seeds have a higher percentage of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA, the omega-3 found in plant foods) than flax seeds. And unlike flax, chia doesn't need to be ground in order for its nutrients to be available to the body. Chia also contains protein, fiber, and antioxidants.

I enjoy chia's nutty taste and occasionally mix the seeds into batter for cookies or breads. Or you can sprinkle a teaspoon of the seeds over cereals, salads, and soups. Chia seeds are available online (one website is chiaseedandoil.com) and at some health food stores. Chia is also an ingredient in some energy bars and snack chips.

You can learn more about chia's health benefits by visiting eatchia.com (this site also includes a few chia recipes) or reading *Chia: Rediscovering a Forgotten Crop of the Aztecs* by Ricardo Ayerza, Jr., and Wayne Coates (University of Arizona Press, 2005).

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Dr. Andrew Weil's

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Andrew Weil, MD

The Reality of a Raw Foods Diet

A raw foods diet is a hot trend in eating, without the kitchen even getting warm. Foods are either eaten raw or prepared using methods where the heat goes no higher than 116° F. Raw foodists say that higher cooking temperatures destroy the enzymes in foods, making the body work harder to digest them.

What it is. A raw foods diet is also vegan, consisting mainly of fresh fruits and vegetables (ideally organic), along with nuts, seeds, and sprouted beans. Refined sugars, meat, poultry, fish, and dairy products are avoided. Nothing is cooked. Beverages run from juices and purified water to sun tea (brewed by sunlight) and even wine. Not cooking may sound easy, but going raw can be challenging and labor intensive. To venture beyond eating fresh produce, nuts, and salads, your kitchen may need a juicer, blender or food processor, dehydrator, sprouter to grow your own, and spiralizer to slice vegetables thinly. Ground nuts serve as flour, while vegetable ribbons become pasta. The diet includes both raw foods, meaning fruits and vegetables in their uncooked state, and "living" foods, which are fermented or cultured with good bacteria, dehydrated, or sprouted.

Health claims. Raw food enthusiasts typically lose weight and report having more energy, thinking clearer, feeling better overall, and getting sick less. There's limited scientific evidence to support these claims.

My take. I think the main advantage of raw foods comes from eating more fruits and vegetables while avoiding animal products and processed foods. Any purported health benefits likely result from making such a radical shift in eating and shedding pounds. But this low-fat, high-fiber diet may fall short in calcium, iron, zinc, omega-3s, and vitamins D and B-12. The argument that raw foods preserve enzyme content is, frankly, nuts. The enzymes in food are destroyed by stomach acid as thoroughly as by cooking. Also, there is nothing unhealthy about cooked foods: Cooking is one of the greatest inventions for improving health and longevity. Some nutrients like lycopene in tomatoes are more available to the body from cooked foods. Cooking also destroys natural toxins in mushrooms, beans, and other vegetables. The raw foods restaurants I've visited use nuts immoderately, and most dishes require far more work to make than I'm willing to do at home. 

Assessing Soy's Impact on Your Health

Soy seems two-faced: Foods made from soybeans have been touted as cure-alls for a variety of health concerns or denounced as harmful additions to the American diet. I think there are many reasons to consume a moderate amount of soy daily: the omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, vitamins, and minerals and low amount of saturated fat, for example, especially if this vegetable protein displaces animal protein. In the last few years, we've discovered that soy, once thought to hinder iron absorption in the blood, is actually an excellent plant-based source of this mineral.

Many of soy's benefits are linked to its abundance of isoflavones, plant-based compounds with estrogen-like effects (phytoestrogens) that have a similar chemical structure to that hormone, but with different effects. Exactly how phytoestrogens affect the body is unknown, but some studies suggest they may help prevent cancer and cardiovascular disease, reduce hot flashes, and maintain bone mass. Below I'll evaluate a number of health claims.

Heart Health ▶ The protein in soy foods seems to modestly lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol, by about 3 percent, and the isoflavones may improve the health of arteries. A study of nearly 65,000 Asian women found soy food consumption reduced the risk of heart attack by 86 percent (*Journal of Nutrition*, September 2003). Findings from studies on whether soy can lower blood pressure have been inconsistent. But in one study, people with hypertension who consumed 40 grams of soy protein a day for 12 weeks reduced both systolic and diastolic blood pressure (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, July 2005).

Bone Health ▶ Soy's isoflavones seem to reduce bone loss in postmenopausal women, although clinical trials have produced inconsistent results. Last year, a large study of some 24,000 postmenopausal women in China found that those who ate two or three servings of soy a day were about one-third less likely to break a bone than women who consumed little. Soy was most protective in the early years after menopause. (A decline in estrogen is linked to bone-weakening diseases after menopause.) Bone mass in the spine starts to decline after 30, which is a reason to consume soy early on. Soy intake has been shown to help maintain spinal bone density in women between 30 and 40. Although less studied, men may also benefit. In a small trial, soy increased a substance associated with bone formation in men (*Journal of Nutrition*, September 2002). In the next few years, the results of several studies on soy and bone mass are expected to be released.

Menopause ▶ Of the more than 30 studies of soy and hot flashes, about half have shown benefits while the others have not. There may be reasons for the inconsistent results, according to Mark Messina, PhD, professor of nutrition at Loma Linda University in California and a soy-foods expert. "One analysis suggests soy worked mostly in women with frequent hot flashes, at least five a day," he says. "Another factor could be the way each woman metabolizes isoflavones." While the

evidence is hardly definitive, I suggest that women include a moderate amount of soy in their diets during menopause to help relieve symptoms and maintain bone mass.

Cancer ▶ The cells that make up the prostate gland, colon, breasts, and uterus contain a large number of receptors that are sensitive to estrogen and, it seems, phytoestrogens found in soy. Low rates of prostate and breast cancer in Japan and other Asian countries where soy is a dietary staple compared to high rates in the United States have spurred much research. Results suggest that by binding to estrogen receptors, isoflavones prevent the body's estrogen from binding to them; this may impede cancer cells from growing and multiplying.

Breast cancer. Soy has been linked to a reduction in the risk of breast cancer as well as to an increase. How can this be? To prevent cancer, it seems the isoflavones work by binding to estrogen receptors and also blocking xenoestrogens, breast-cancer-causing estrogens supplied by environmental factors. But there's some concern that these same isoflavones in soy may increase a woman's breast cancer risk by stimulating a proliferation of breast cells, especially in women with breast cancer or at high risk. (This is based on animal research more than clinical studies.) I think the population studies that show a cancer-fighting benefit outweigh the animal and test-tube studies that suggest soy may increase cancer cell growth or breast tissue density, which has been linked to breast cancer. Again, consumption early on may be key: Soy seems to affect how breast tissue develops and may be more beneficial when females start to consume it in childhood and adolescence.

Although the combination of soy and tamoxifen, an anti-estrogen drug taken to prevent breast cancer or its recurrence, has been linked to an increased risk of blood clots, cataracts, and uterine and liver cancers, I think the evidence is insufficient. I believe it's okay for people on tamoxifen to consume one or two daily servings of soy. (Some colleagues disagree with me on this point.)

Prostate cancer. There is at least preliminary evidence that soy foods might help to reduce prostate cancer risk, and some researchers speculate that the isoflavones in soy may someday prove useful in the treatment of prostate cancer. Soy isoflavones have been linked to a reduction in prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels, which are a marker for prostate cancer. I believe this is reason enough for men to consume soy.

A moderate consumption of soy is one to two servings per day (about 30 to 50 mg of isoflavones). A serving is 1 cup of soy milk, 1/2 cup of tofu, tempeh, or soybeans, one soy burger, or about 1/4 cup of soy nuts. Consume more whole soy foods like tofu, tempeh, miso (soybean paste), and edamame (lightly boiled soybeans in the pod) and fewer processed soy foods containing soy isolates and texturized soy protein. Also avoid supplements, including soy protein powder, which is typically made into shakes or added to juice and may contain up to 180 mg of isoflavones per glass, and functional foods like cereals or breads spiked with soy isoflavones. 

Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis

Recalling the day on which she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), author Mary Felstiner writes in her recent memoir, *Out of Joint* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005): “Hours before morning I wake feeling my wrists starched . . . and scorched. What is this?” That afternoon, the 28-year-old new mother learns *this* is RA, a chronic inflammatory condition in which the immune system attacks the tissues lining the joints. Her brain struggles to grasp her doctor’s words: “joints stiffen . . . inflamed membranes thicken . . . erode cartilage.”

In RA, joints in the hands and feet are typically affected, causing pain, swelling, redness, and heat. But the disease can also involve the shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees. Women with RA outnumber men by more than three to one, and it often strikes several decades earlier than osteoarthritis. I asked rheumatologist Dan Muller, MD, PhD, of the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison to explain what’s new in integrative treatment approaches for RA. One point he likes to emphasize with his patients is that there’s a lot you can do for yourself to treat this autoimmune disorder.

MEDICATIONS Although an “all-natural” approach to RA is possible, it’s more likely to work in the most mild cases. Medications clearly have a place in RA treatment both for comfort and to control flares. I’m encouraged to hear from Dr. Muller that the medications for RA have never been better; in fact, they have revolutionized treatment. These drugs can slow the disease process, leading to fewer joints affected by inflammation and less long-term damage to them.

In “mild” cases of RA, Dr. Muller might prescribe hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil), sulfasalazine (Azulfidine), or minocycline (Minocin). People with moderate or severe cases of the disease might need one of three drugs in a class known as TNF inhibitors—including etanercept (Enbrel), infliximab (Remicade), or adalimumab (Humira) in combination with methotrexate (Rheumatrex) or its alternative, leflunomide (Arava). The good news, says Dr. Muller, is that through combination therapy with these new medications, some 30 percent of people with RA can achieve a complete remission (previously, the chance for remission was only about 10 percent). The bad news is that this leaves 70 percent of people out of that category. Yet, a substantial number of those still greatly benefit from taking the drugs.

DIET AND LIFESTYLE I suggest following an anti-inflammatory diet. This eating plan emphasizes more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and foods rich in omega-3 fats such as salmon, walnuts, and ground flax. But it cuts back on animal protein (except fish), saturated and trans fats, plus foods made from refined flour and sugar. While eating this way has not been studied for RA, it closely resembles a Mediterranean-style diet, which some research suggests may have protective effects on the development and severity of RA. In addition, I think it’s worth experimenting with eliminating milk and other dairy products, wheat, or corn for at least two

months to see how your symptoms respond, since food sensitivities may play a role in some cases of RA. I’d also advise using olive oil as your main fat and seasoning foods more with ginger and turmeric, three ingredients with natural anti-inflammatory compounds.

Contrary to previous research, consuming more than four cups of coffee a day does not appear to increase your chances of developing RA (*Arthritis & Rheumatism*, November 2003). However, this study reached the same conclusion as others had about tobacco: Smokers were more likely to develop RA than nonsmokers.

MIND-BODY APPROACHES I like to recommend mind-body approaches such as meditation, guided imagery, or hypnotherapy for RA. Although these practices need to be better studied, one analysis of clinical trials noted they led to significant improvements in RA pain, disability, mental well-being, and coping skills. Another study found journaling improved health status in people with RA who wrote about a stressful experience for 20 minutes on three consecutive days. In a journal, you can keep a record of your emotions, experiences, and symptoms. And we’re awaiting results from one small study that ended last year and explored the usefulness of a mindfulness-based meditation program for RA symptoms. To purchase a guided imagery recording for people with RA, visit healthjourneys.com.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY Studies have found that physical activity can help keep muscles around the joints strong, restoring movement in them and possibly improving pain control. Regular exercise also helps patients with RA feel stronger physically and mentally. Dr. Muller advises doing some aerobic activity, stretching, and strength training using light weights and frequent repetitions. Water exercise is a good option for stiff joints, as is yoga or tai chi, which have the added benefit of a mind-body component.

SUPPLEMENTS There’s some evidence that fish oils, which are rich in omega-3 fats and have anti-inflammatory effects, help reduce joint tenderness, morning stiffness, and the use of over-the-counter pain relievers. Dr. Muller recommends a daily dose of 3 to 6 grams. In addition to the culinary use of ginger and turmeric, you can also supplement with 1 gram of powdered ginger or curcumin (an active component in turmeric), two or three times a day. I also suggest a daily antioxidant regimen, which includes vitamins C and E, mixed carotenoids, and selenium, or taking a good multivitamin; and get at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D every day, which may help regulate immunity.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES Dr. Muller says he’s excited about some promising evidence for low-level laser therapy. A review study suggests this treatment, which uses a light source and is given several times a week, can relieve pain and morning stiffness in the hands on a short-term basis. **SP**

Strategies for Easing Anxious Minds

There's no shortage of things to worry about in this day and age: bird flu, terrorism, global warming. But for people with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), the mind is a worry machine, routinely dwelling on "what ifs" and worst-case scenarios. Sufferers may feel on edge, experience a lot of muscle tension, and have trouble concentrating and sleeping. Constant worry and tension may also bring on health problems like irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, and teeth grinding. Women are twice as likely as men to have GAD, and the disorder appears to run in some families.

I think the medications used to treat GAD are less than ideal. Benzodiazepines (like Xanax and Ativan) can calm you down quickly, but they also make you drowsy, interfere with mental function, and are addictive. Antidepressants such as Prozac, Effexor, and Lexapro can be helpful for anxiety, but all of them have side effects. Fortunately, I've found that natural approaches for anxiety can allow many GAD patients to reduce or eliminate the need for drugs. Some ideas below are from Roberta Lee, MD, medical director of the Continuum Center for Health & Healing in New York City, who treats many patients with anxiety disorders.

1 Do breathing exercises. These are among the best anti-anxiety measures I know. When you're anxious, your breathing quickens and becomes shallower, but consciously regulating your breath can give you an immediate sense of control. One technique I highly recommend is the Relaxing Breath: Inhale through your nose for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7, and exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. For detailed instructions and more exercises, see my books or my new *Mind-Body Tool Kit*, which includes two CDs, a workbook, and mind-training cards for breath work, meditation, guided imagery, and sound therapy. To order, call (888) 337-9345 or visit drweilselfhealing.com.

2 Avoid caffeine and other stimulants. People who have anxiety disorders tend to be more sensitive to the stimulating effects of caffeine, so I suggest cutting out all sources, including coffee, tea, soft drinks, energy drinks, chocolate, and many over-the-counter drugs (especially pain relievers and diet aids). Also, avoid stimulant herbs such as bitter orange, guaraná, kola nut, and yerba maté. And if you smoke, quit; nicotine is a powerful brain stimulant.

3 Be active. Regular aerobic exercise (like brisk walking, cycling, or swimming) can ease anxiety in several ways: by relaxing tight muscles, by increasing the production of serotonin, "feel-good" endorphins, and other brain chemicals that influence mood, and by reducing levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Working out for 20 to 40 minutes at a time appears to be more effective at lessening anxiety than doing several shorter bouts of exercise throughout the day. Aim for aerobic activity at least five days a week. There's also some evidence that strength training and yoga can benefit anxiety.

4 Take up meditation. Quieting the mind through meditation can help keep anxious thoughts at bay. Research shows that people with anxiety disorders who participated in an eight-week stress-reduction program based on mindfulness

meditation (which involves remaining aware of bodily sensations and thoughts, without passing judgment on them) experienced long-term reductions in anxiety. To find a program near you, visit umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr. For more on mindfulness meditation, see *Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley, MD (New Harbinger, 2003).

5 Consider cognitive-behavioral therapy. This form of psychotherapy has proved effective for GAD. A therapist helps you to identify unreasonably negative thoughts that trigger anxiety and replace them with more positive, realistic ones. Cognitive-behavioral therapy also teaches better coping skills. To find a therapist, visit nabt.org or aabt.org.

6 Take a multivitamin and omega-3s. Dr. Lee says people with anxiety problems fare better when taking these supplements. Choose a multivitamin that includes a full range of B vitamins, which play a role in maintaining a balanced mood, as well as magnesium, which can help relax muscles. As for omega-3s, population-based studies have linked a deficiency in these healthy fats with increased anxiety and depression. Dr. Lee suggests taking 1 to 3 grams of fish oil a day.

7 Experiment with herbs. Several herbs have shown positive results in treating generalized anxiety. (For all, follow package directions, and don't use together with anti-anxiety drugs.) The best studied is kava. A few years ago, it was linked to rare cases of liver dysfunction, and I still don't recommend it to anyone with liver disease. But more recent research has led me to believe that it's safe and effective for others, including people with GAD. Even so, Dr. Lee suggests having your doctor check your liver function regularly as a precaution. Another option is valerian, which appeared helpful for GAD in one study (*Phytotherapy Research*, November 2002). You may need to take valerian for several weeks to notice benefits. Another study of GAD patients compared the herb passionflower to the anti-anxiety drug Serax. The drug worked more quickly, but by the end of the four-week study, both proved equally effective, and the herb had fewer side effects (*Journal of Clinical Pharmacy and Therapeutics*, October 2001).

8 Try guided imagery and hypnotherapy. Both of these mind-body methods can lessen anxiety symptoms. A practitioner of Interactive Guided Imagery can help you create an image of your anxiety (for example, an electrical overload) and its relief (a calm flow of energy throughout your body), then you can visualize your healing image for a few minutes a day. For referrals, visit academyforguidedimagery.com. Or try listening to a guided-imagery CD called *Anxiety Relief* from Martin Rossman, MD; to order, visit soundstrue.com. Meanwhile, a hypnotherapist can teach you how to enter a trance, a state of heightened suggestibility, to induce relaxation. For referrals, visit asch.net. Or check out a self-hypnosis recording on anxiety and panic from Steven Gurgevich, PhD; to order, visit tranceformation.com.

9 Explore acupuncture. There's promising evidence that this needling technique can reduce anxiety, perhaps by altering levels of certain brain chemicals. To find an acupuncturist in your area, visit nccaom.org. 

Ask Dr. Weil Dry Eyes; Unpasteurized Milk; and More

What can I do for extremely dry eyes? I use preservative-free artificial tears with limited relief.

You need to find the reason behind the itching, burning, and eye irritation. Dry eyes are very common and occur when the body can't produce enough tears or the correct composition of tears. It may be due to environmental irritants, medications such as antihistamines, antidepressants, or oral contraceptives, or may be a symptom of an autoimmune disease—Sjögren's syndrome—marked by dry eyes, dry mouth, and a lack of moisture in other body tissues. For this reason, I recommend people with dry eyes get a physical exam in addition to using preservative-free artificial tears (which you have already done), protecting their eyes from dry heat with a humidifier, wearing glasses to combat wind, and avoiding smoke. Also, you might eat more fish: The large Women's Health Study found that eating a diet high in omega-3 fatty acids reduced the risk of dry eye syndrome.

Are there alternative treatments to surgery for Dupuytren's contracture?

A combination of medication and mind-body therapies can help relieve symptoms or slow the progression of Dupuytren's contracture, an abnormal thickening of the fibrous tissue in the palm and fingers that can cause the fingers to curl inward. The cause of Dupuytren's isn't known, but it appears to occur more often in men than women and is associated with manual labor, smoking, alcohol, and certain medical conditions such as diabetes, thyroid problems, and seizures. Although usually painless, it can be debilitating and there's no cure. Surgery to remove the tissue is often advised, but I think it should be a last resort. I recommend the prescription drug Potaba—a form of PABA, a chemical that belongs to the B-vitamin group. By increasing oxygen to the tissue, Potaba may prevent or reduce thickening. For best results, I suggest taking the drug in conjunction with acupuncture, hypnosis, or other mind-body therapies. Acupuncture may help by influencing energy flows in the hand, and hypnosis can bring about healing anywhere in the body.

Is raw milk any more nutritious than pasteurized milk?

Any nutritional advantages of raw or unpasteurized cow's milk, which can be sold legally for human consumption in 28 states, may be offset by an increased risk of foodborne illness. Proponents of raw milk argue that pasteurization, which involves heating the milk to destroy disease-causing bacteria, diminishes vitamin content, kills "good" bacteria that benefit gastrointestinal health, and is associated with milk allergies. Yet, most public health officials say that pasteurization is necessary because unpasteurized milk may contain harmful bugs such as salmonella, listeria, and *E. coli* and those that cause brucellosis and tuberculosis. Indeed, a number of cases of foodborne illness each year are linked to

consuming raw milk. The Food and Drug Administration admits that pasteurization may result in nutrient losses of up to 10 percent for certain B vitamins, but suggests that these reductions are marginal.

Because foodborne illnesses are particularly risky for infants and young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with compromised immune systems, I think these individuals should avoid drinking raw milk. Diets that are high in cow's milk and other dairy products may worsen or increase the risk of a variety of health conditions (see the October 2005 issue to learn more), so I prefer using soy milk. This beverage, which doesn't need to be pasteurized, is a good source of healthful isoflavones, protein, and (if fortified) calcium and vitamin D.

What is your opinion of the supplement Celadrin, which I have used for mild knee pain and a fractured elbow?

This product is made from a combination of animal fats called cetylated fatty acids that manufacturers claim can reduce inflammation and restore the fluid that cushions bones and joints. Celadrin comes in capsules or as a cream that can be applied to the skin for minor aches. Preliminary research suggests that cetylated fatty acids might have some benefit for those with arthritis. It's not clear to me how the fatty acids would work to reduce joint pain, although manufacturers say that Celadrin helps the popular arthritis supplement glucosamine to work more effectively in building joint cartilage. I have no personal experience using these fatty acids or Celadrin, and would like to see larger studies before recommending it.

In general, to help arthritis and other aches and pains I recommend eating an anti-inflammatory diet that includes omega-3-rich fats, maintaining a healthy weight, and getting regular exercise. You can also try acupuncture for pain relief. For my comprehensive treatment advice, see *Self Healing's* special report on osteoarthritis, which can be purchased by calling (888) 337-9345 or visiting drweilselfhealing.com.

Is fortified rice milk a good alternative to cow's milk?

Rice milk has significantly less protein than cow's milk because it's made mostly from brown rice and sweetener. One cup of this plant-based dairy substitute has only 1 gram of protein compared to 8 grams in cow's milk and 7 grams in soy milk. Rice milk has a slightly sweet taste and light flavor that's pleasant to drink, add to cereal, or use when you're cooking or baking. But if children drink rice beverages exclusively, they must increase protein-rich foods in their diets. They'll also get less calcium than from soy or cow's milk. Rice milk has the advantage of containing no lactose (milk sugar), casein (a cow's milk protein some people are allergic to), or cholesterol, but offers fewer essential fats and more carbohydrates than cow's milk. Choose brands that are enriched with calcium and vitamins A and D.

What can I do to get rid of cataracts?

You can take steps to help prevent cataracts or slow their progression, but there's not much to help remove them except surgery. Cataracts form when the lens in the eye clouds, because of protein changes that may be due to damage by free radical compounds. Extremely common as you get older, cataracts can blur your vision, fade colors, and also increase the eye's sensitivity to glare.

The best way to manage age-related cataracts is an early diagnosis from regular eye exams. You may also avoid them or slow their development by not smoking, wearing UV protective sunglasses, and eating plenty of antioxidant-rich fruits

and vegetables. I also recommend taking a daily antioxidant regimen: 200 mg of vitamin C, 400 IU of natural vitamin E (or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols), 200 mcg of selenium, and 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids. Some studies found that older adults who supplemented with vitamins C or E for a decade or longer greatly lowered their chances of cataracts. But if cataracts are interfering with your usual activities, I'd suggest cataract surgery to replace the clouded lens with a clear artificial implant; it takes less than an hour and is both safe and effective. **SP**

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Cutting Calories Keeps Hearts Young. Eating a very low calorie diet may help the heart age more slowly, says a recent study. Researchers compared 25 people who had already followed a calorie-restricted yet nutritionally balanced diet for an average of six years (offering about 1,670 calories per day) to 25 people who ate a typical Western diet (2,445 calories). Ultrasound testing revealed that those who restricted calories had the heart functions of people about 15 years younger than their age. They also had lower blood pressure and lower levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation and emerging risk factor for heart disease. (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, January 17, 2006)

Comment: Earlier studies on animals suggest that the main benefits of caloric restriction are on cardiovascular health. My question is whether following a very low calorie diet makes it more difficult to get enough healthy fats to promote optimum health of the brain. For more about caloric restriction, see the March 2004 issue.

Cell Phones Hang Up Home Life. Cell phones and pagers are modern-day conveniences that can inconvenience home life. That's the conclusion of a recent study in which 1,300 people in working couples were interviewed and it was found that over several years of use, cell phones and pagers decreased family satisfaction and increased tension by allowing work problems into the home. Working women seemed to be hardest hit by their increased accessibility as these new technologies allowed work to cut into home life and family matters to interfere with work. (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, December 2005)

Comment: I think we need to consider setting limits and boundaries on how much we're willing to let new communication technologies intrude upon our personal lives and blur the lines between work and home.

Can L-Arginine Harm the Heart? A planned two-year study of L-arginine was halted after only six months when six participants in a clinical trial who were taking this amino acid supplement died. Roughly half of 153 people who had previously suffered a heart attack took about 3 grams of L-arginine a day in addition to their usual medical treatment, while a second group was given a placebo. No deaths were reported in the group taking the placebo. Also, L-arginine did not seem to reduce stiffness in blood vessels or improve the heart's pumping action, two presumed benefits of the supplement. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, January 4, 2006)

Comment: While other studies have shown promise for the use of L-arginine in treating coronary artery disease, this was the first to show harm and it's concerning. Yet, I'd like to know more about the cause of death of these patients, since we don't know for sure whether the increased risk of death was due to L-arginine, something else, or even pure chance.

Americans Report Aging Well. Older Americans enjoy good health, according to a recent study, and many factors that compromise health can be modified. Researchers collected self-reported health evaluations from nearly 3,500 men and women in Utah who were 65 or older. Although approximately half of the participants had at least one major illness, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or cancer, most—even those over 85—still lived independently and reported excellent or good health. The factors mainly associated with the seniors' perception of being healthy were vision, hearing, and mood, all of which can be changed for the better. (*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, February 2006)

Comment: This is good news. People today are living longer and better than their parents as a result of taking better care of themselves. They also have more access to health-care products and services, including those of conventional and alternative medicine. **SP**

Melatonin: A Multitasker

It's been called the "hormone of darkness" because your body makes it almost exclusively at night. The pineal gland secretes melatonin during the night to regulate sleep, and supplemental melatonin is a popular remedy for insomnia and jet lag. I've used it with good results. For jet lag, I'll take 2.5 mg of a sublingual (under the tongue) tablet at bedtime for a night or two upon arrival. I'll take the same amount for occasional insomnia, although a much lower dose, about 0.3 mg, appears to be more effective if you're taking melatonin for more than a few consecutive nights. I like the increase in remembered dreams that I get from melatonin. (A few unlucky individuals report nightmares.)

Researchers are reporting that supplemental melatonin may have many other benefits, including prolonging the lives of various cancer patients. Plus, there's increasing evidence that the melatonin made by your body doesn't just regulate sleep but also helps protect against breast cancer.

Nighttime light, melatonin, and breast cancer. Scientists have long known that breast cancer rates are much higher in industrialized nations than in developing countries. In 1987, cancer epidemiologist Richard Stevens, PhD, proposed that artificial light at night might increase breast cancer risk by suppressing melatonin production. Several years later, Stevens and other researchers showed that women who work frequent night shifts—and are exposed to a large amount of light at night—are more likely to develop breast cancer (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, October 17, 2001).

More recently, researchers found that women who have higher levels of melatonin are at lower risk of getting breast cancer (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, July 20, 2005). Another study compared the effects of pumping melatonin-rich or melatonin-depleted blood into human breast tumors implanted in rats. The melatonin-depleted blood, drawn from women after 90 minutes of exposure to bright nighttime light, spurred tumor growth in the animals. In contrast, the melatonin-rich blood, collected after two hours of darkness, slowed tumor growth. Further experiments by the same researchers suggested that melatonin can "put cancer cells to sleep" by blocking their ability to soak up linoleic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid that's in polyunsaturated vegetable oils and that can promote cell proliferation (*Cancer Research*, December 1, 2005).

So far, there have been no studies on whether melatonin supplements can reduce breast cancer risk in humans. But it may be wise to take steps to increase your body's natural production of melatonin. Don't skimp on sleep, and avoid bright light once you've gone to bed. That means not falling asleep

with the bedroom TV on and using a nightlight rather than the bathroom light for nightly trips there. (Dim light has relatively little effect on melatonin.) Get regular exercise, which boosts melatonin production and also encourages sounder sleep. Consider taking up meditation: Several studies show that meditating regularly can increase blood levels of melatonin. And avoid evening use of melatonin-suppressing substances like alcohol and beta-blocker drugs.

Promising uses of melatonin. I've been pleased to see research suggesting that melatonin supplements may extend survival in certain cancer patients. A recent meta-analysis of 10 European trials examined the effects of large doses of melatonin (10 to 40 mg a day) in people with solid tumor cancers, including lung, brain, skin, renal, and breast cancer. Taking the hormone reduced the risk of death at one year by 34 percent, and no serious side effects were reported (*Journal of Pineal Research*, November 2005).

Donald Abrams, MD, chief of hematology/oncology at San Francisco General Hospital and a graduate Associate Fellow of the Program in Integrative Medicine, says melatonin has been best researched in non-small cell lung cancer patients, and a US study involving such patients is under way. He suggests that people with this malignancy take 12 to 20 mg of melatonin a day at bedtime, and I think anyone with a metastatic solid tumor may benefit from the same dosage.

Melatonin looks promising for other health problems, although much remains to be learned about how it helps:

- **Headaches.** A Brazilian study of migraine patients found that taking 3 mg of melatonin 30 minutes before bedtime for three months cut headache frequency by at least 50 percent in most participants, and both migraine intensity and duration also decreased (*Neurology*, August 24, 2004). Earlier research in Italy suggested that using melatonin at a dose of 10 mg each evening could help prevent cluster headaches (an excruciating type that occurs about the same time each day for weeks or months) once a cluster period has begun.

- **High blood pressure.** In a study of men with untreated hypertension, those who took 2.5 mg of melatonin one hour before bedtime for three weeks had a significant decrease in nighttime blood pressure levels—a six-point average drop in systolic blood pressure and a four-point drop in diastolic pressure (*Hypertension*, February 2004). The same researchers are now exploring whether melatonin supplements can improve sleep in women and men with hypertension who are on beta-blockers, which lower melatonin levels.

- **IBS.** A study in Singapore involving people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) who had sleep disturbances found that taking 3 mg of melatonin at bedtime for two weeks reduced abdominal pain, even though there was no improvement in sleeping problems (*Gut*, October 2005). 

next issue

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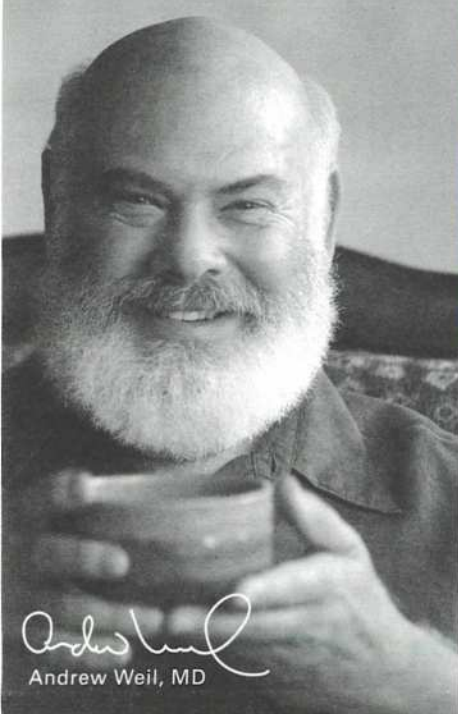
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ON MY MIND

Tisanes

Strictly speaking, tea comes from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, an evergreen that gives us black, green, oolong, and white varieties. Other plant-based beverages not from *Camellia sinensis* are more accurately called tisanes, or herbal infusions, rather than teas. You might know tisanes as herbal "teas."

What they are. You make tisanes by pouring hot water over the leaves, stems, flowers, fruits, or roots of a plant or mixture of plants. Often consumed for their therapeutic effects and lack of caffeine, two popular tisanes are chamomile, a soothing stress reliever, and peppermint for an upset stomach. Rooibos, honeybush, and hibiscus are other herbal infusions.

Bottom line. Antioxidant expert Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD, of Tufts University says tisanes offer something beyond their nutrient value—they provide health benefits. "Herbal infusions have different antioxidant fractions than tea and a long history of use as folk remedies, but their healthful properties have been understudied by scientists," he adds.

My Advice for Quieting Noise Pollution

I'm very interested in how exposure to sounds from the environment affects us on both physical and emotional levels even if we're unconscious of them. While many sounds are pleasant, noise pollution can push the brain and nervous system away from calmness in the direction of agitation, anxiety, and insomnia. Everyday noise that may not cause hearing loss can unknowingly influence health. I'll discuss how noise might be impacting you.

Increases stress. Sudden loud noise like a clap of thunder can make your heart pound and bring on brief stress. But scientists are finding that everyday sounds, such as street traffic or conversation, may have a similar effect that's milder yet constant. Researchers who looked at 115 Austrian children found that kids living in neighborhoods with constant low-level noise, mostly train and car traffic, released more of the stress hormone cortisol while sleeping than those living in more tranquil locations (*Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, March 2001). In a new study, researchers questioned 2,000 heart attack survivors and a similar number of control subjects, and noticed a link between chronic noise and heart attack risk. The noise itself seemed to be more important for cardiovascular health than being annoyed by it (*European Heart Journal*, February 2006).

Lowers productivity and motivation. Noise may also stifle your willingness to complete tasks, or at least work at them. In a study of 40 female clerical workers assigned to either an office with low-intensity noise (conversation, typing, and ringing phones) or a quieter workspace, researchers observed that although neither group reported feeling stressed, those in the noisier area had higher levels of a stress hormone and made 40 percent fewer attempts to solve a difficult puzzle (*Journal of Applied Psychology*, October 2000).

Slows healing. Hospital environments often expose patients to harmful noise levels from 60 to 72 decibels (roughly equivalent to

rush hour traffic) throughout the day and night, according to studies. In one research project, acoustic experts found that many sounds in hospitals are the same frequency as human speech, forcing doctors and nurses to speak even louder and causing more noise. This noise, they say, may prevent patients from sleeping, slow their rate of recovery, and stress the staff, raising the risk for mistakes.

Here are tips for limiting noise pollution:

1 Become aware of everyday sounds so that you can exert some choice. If you notice that you have constant traffic and conversation around you for most of the day, make time to explore a park or other quiet place.

2 If you can't seek refuge from noise, block out unpleasant ones with noise-canceling headphones or purchase a machine that creates white noise, which contains all frequencies and can mask other sounds. CDs or a sound conditioner machine with sounds from nature can also be helpful. (For more on sound therapy, see my new *Mind-Body Tool Kit*. To order, visit drweilselfhealing.com.)

3 Listen wisely. Despite some experts' concern over the directness of sound transmission into the eardrum from ear buds compared to headphones worn over the ears, I don't think the new systems are damaging. Just limit your listening to an hour at a time and never play music so loud that you can't hear the people talking around you or that they can hear your music.

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Confused about what to eat after three studies in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* this February found that following a low-fat diet for eight years offered nearly 20,000 healthy postmenopausal women little protection against heart attacks, strokes, and breast and colon cancers? There's no need to give up on healthy eating since the results don't mean that diet and fat intake make no difference in preventing heart disease and cancer.

These studies focused solely on reducing total fat, a promising idea among nutrition experts when the studies were first designed, but one replaced by the belief that the *types* of fat consumed are more significant to overall health. Even with years of nutrition counseling, participants had difficulty reducing their fat levels. I have long suggested allowing enough healthy fat in your diet from olive oil, fish, and nuts to make food appealing, while restricting saturated and trans fats and some polyunsaturated vegetable oils like safflower, sunflower, soybean, and corn.

Women who had the highest fat consumption when the study began *did* significantly reduce their odds of breast cancer after they cut their fat intake closer to 20 percent of calories and maintained this level throughout the trial compared to those who ate their usual foods. Also, a slight reduction in heart disease was seen in women who reduced saturated or trans fat.

Perhaps dietary changes adopted *before* middle age may be more protective against chronic disease, especially if they're combined with other aspects of lifestyle like controlling weight, getting regular exercise, and not smoking. Finally, trimming fat alone might not be enough to achieve health benefits; you also need to keep an eye on total calories.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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cover photo: Tom Spitz

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Three Allergy Remedies That Work

You don't need to suffer through another allergy season or resort to antihistamines that leave you groggy. Natural treatments can be just as effective for controlling symptoms and, unlike antihistamine drugs, can get to the root of the problem by stabilizing the membrane of cells that react to pollen and other irritants. My plan for seasonal allergies includes the following three supplements; it's fine to take all three together.

Quercetin. This bioflavonoid (plant pigment) is found in foods and beverages like apples, onions, dark berries, and tea and is a good preventive supplement for hay fever. It appears to reduce the body's inflammatory response to pollen and other allergens and lower the production and release of histamine, a substance that contributes to allergy symptoms. I suggest taking 500 mg of quercetin twice a day between meals starting two months before allergy season and continuing throughout it. Children under age 10 can take half this dose. No side effects have been reported, but lab and animal studies suggest quercetin may interfere with chemotherapy. And avoid it during pregnancy since a maximum safe dose has yet to be established.

Stinging nettle. For itchy eyes, ears, throat, and nose, stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) works as an anti-inflammatory and, like quercetin, interferes with the release of histamine. But unlike quercetin, which prevents symptoms, nettle relieves them. I think the herb does a better job than antihistamine drugs and has fewer side effects. Take one to two freeze-dried capsules every three to four hours to control allergy symptoms. Children old enough to swallow capsules (age six or so) can take one capsule daily. I like the product from the Eclectic Institute.

Butterbur. If symptoms persist, research suggests butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) may work as well as conventional antihistamines, but without causing drowsiness, and is especially effective for treating hay fever. I recommend 50 mg two to three times a day for adults and children over age 10. Children aged six to nine can take 50 mg once a day. In its natural state, the herb contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs) that are toxic to the liver, so look for products labeled as PA-free butterbur extracts. One reliable brand is Petadolex, sold in gelscaps. Avoid butterbur if you're pregnant or breastfeeding. 

Chefs Tell: Secrets of Healthy Cooking

Some people mistakenly believe that healthy food is dull, bland, or provides little pleasure. Another complaint I hear is, “Everything I like to eat is bad for me,” often paired with the question, “If it’s bad for me, why does it taste so good?” Perhaps eating well is more about re-educating your taste buds and learning some cooking skills. I’m convinced that healthy food and delicious food are not mutually exclusive, and that health and pleasure *can* come together at the table as appetizing, tasty, and satisfying food.

So I’ve recruited two cooking experts who, along with me, will share some tricks of the trade. Both Dan Barber, executive chef and owner of the New York-based restaurants Blue Hill in Manhattan and Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Westchester, and Annemarie Colbin, founder of The National Gourmet Institute for Health & Culinary Arts in New York City, will be speakers at the third annual Nutrition and Health Conference. Dan will join me and other experts on April 30 as part of a panel discussion on food, politics, and society. Tickets for this public forum in New York are \$85 in advance and can be purchased by calling (520) 626-2468 or at http://integrativemedicine.arizona.edu/nutrition/2006/publicforum_reg.html. Annemarie will talk about whole-foods nutrition and popular diets during the three-day conference from May 1 to 3. To register for the conference, which is intended for health professionals, call (212) 305-3334 or visit columbiacme.org.

Ingredients. Delicious food starts with good (ideally, fresh) ingredients. Both Annemarie and I feel extra-virgin olive oil is a necessity in a healthy kitchen. It adds flavor, is a healthy fat, provides antioxidants, and is extremely versatile for dressings, cooking, and on bread. She also feels salt is crucial to cooking for bringing out the other flavors in food. She uses a pinch of fleur de sel, a pricey white sea salt from France.

Dan has an intuitive approach to ingredients, based on the time of year and his surroundings. He likes to support local farmers and is conscious of the seasons when planning meals. To him, many foods have a story attached to them that might influence their taste, whether it’s the carrot stew (see upper right) with heirloom vegetables from his greenhouse or Grandma’s pie recipe; a connection is made to the food or place it’s grown. Manufactured foods don’t allow for this.

Equipment. For me, a food processor is a time saver that makes preparation easier, especially chopping vegetables. Annemarie and I agree that a good set of knives (and sharpener) is a must, as for her is a good set of pots (stainless steel cooking surface, aluminum and copper interior), a cast-iron skillet, and wooden spoons.

Skills. I think cooking starts with imagination, with conceiving, picturing, and anticipating the look, smell, and taste of something wonderful to eat. And you learn cooking by doing it, surrounded by others more experienced than you are. You need to pay attention to how dishes are prepared, then try them yourself, letting your own creativity take wing and learning from your mistakes. What skills should you master? Annemarie suggests proper knife techniques, especially for chopping vegetables, and knowing how to make soup and

Carrot Stew

A favorite of Blue Hill diners, this carrot stew is served warm and makes a delicious side dish or main course when placed over farro, spelt, or another whole grain.

- Place seeds in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring frequently until lightly toasted; add carrot juice and heat gently until three-quarters of the liquid remains.
 - Whisk in butter. Strain the mixture in a sieve to remove lumps.
 - Cut baby carrots into diagonal slices. Place olive oil in a sauté pan and heat. Add carrots and lower the heat so vegetables cook in their own juices for 3 to 5 minutes until tender.
 - Add carrot juice mixture; season to taste with salt, pepper, lime, and herbs. Serves 8.
- 2 pounds baby bunch carrots, peeled
 - 6 ounces freshly juiced carrots or carrot juice
 - 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
 - 1 tablespoon caraway seeds
 - 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons butter
 - 1 lime juiced
 - 1 tablespoon mixed, chopped herbs (i.e., chives, parsley, chervil, tarragon)
 - salt and pepper to taste

Recipe courtesy of Dan Barber and his Blue Hill restaurants.

prepare whole grains, which people often undercook. “And learn how to plan a meal until it’s second nature,” she adds.

The skillful use of herbs and spices is the mark of a good cook. Become one by getting to know some seasonings (fresh and dried), learning their distinctive flavors, fragrances, and best uses. Sample different ones individually such as basil, oregano, thyme, tarragon, and cumin, and then play with combinations. Know how much to add, because too little fails to enliven a dish, and too much can be overpowering. Knowledge comes with practice and tasting. Toasting some spices (such as cumin seeds) in the recipe above helps intensify their flavor. Place them in a skillet over moderate heat until they are fragrant, about 2 to 3 minutes.

Cooking is an art that requires effort to reap its rewards and pleasures. Yet, I agree with Annemarie that preparing your own food has the power to greatly influence your own health and your family’s for the better. After all, the kitchen is a place where good health can begin.

Cookbooks. Need some recipe ideas? Dan’s favorites are the vegetarian cookbooks by Deborah Madison and for international cuisine, anything by Patricia Wells. Annemarie turns to several of her own cookbooks including *The Natural Gourmet* and *Food and Our Bones*, but also recommends Myra Kornfeld’s *The Healthy Hedonist*. Of course, I’m partial to my cookbook with chef Rosie Daley, *The Healthy Kitchen*. 

Lose a Little Weight, Your Health Wins Big

You don't need to be "the biggest loser," dropping the most weight and body fat like the winner of the reality television series, to reap the benefits of weight loss. Losing 5 to 10 percent of your body weight can have a disproportionately positive effect on your health no matter how overweight you may be.

Scientists now know that body fat is not just a storage site, but also acts as an endocrine organ that produces hormones. When people become obese, their fat cells can plump up to three times the normal size, churning out more hormones that promote inflammation, the root cause of many diseases. "This knowledge about fat is revolutionary and enlightening because there are ways to treat obesity and reduce disease risk," says James Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Indianapolis, Indiana, who assists numerous overweight and obese patients with weight management. "The idea of losing 5 to 10 percent of body weight and gaining great benefit from it is validated over and over again in medical research."

I'll discuss some of these health benefits and explain how that first 5 to 10 percent makes such a big difference and why keeping it off is important.

Lowers risk of diabetes. There's a direct correlation between obesity and type 2 diabetes, and losing weight may delay or prevent the full-blown disease. In the Diabetes Prevention Program, a study of some 3,200 overweight and obese people, researchers found that losing just 7 percent of body weight reduced the risk of diabetes by 58 percent for people with impaired glucose tolerance, which often precedes diabetes. How long diabetes can be delayed past the three-year period studied is unknown, but every year without diabetes can mean a year free of disability and costly health care.

Happier in the Bedroom

Weight loss may spark your sex life, too. People who lose up to 10 percent of their body weight report significant improvements in the quality of their sex life, found Duke University researchers who collected questionnaires during a two-year study. The most significant improvements were seen during the first three months, following an 11 percent weight loss. Despite additional weight loss, improvements in sex life remained relatively stable. Women, the majority of the 187 participants, seemed to have more sexual problems at the start of the study and more benefit midway. One year into the study, the number of women who felt sexually unattractive dropped from 68 percent to 26 percent. And women also felt more comfortable being seen naked and had increased desire and sexual enjoyment. The small number of men in the study reported similar improvements.

Eases knee pain. Even taking off a few pounds may drastically reduce the burden on your knees. For every pound lost, there's a four-pound reduction in the pressure that's exerted on the knees, found a recent study that looked at nearly 150 older adults with osteoarthritis of the knee (*Arthritis and Rheumatism*, July 2005).

Reduces cardiovascular risk. Studies show that losing 5 to 13 percent of body weight can reduce harmful levels of triglycerides and LDL ("bad") cholesterol and increase HDL ("good") cholesterol. Moderate weight loss may also reduce or eliminate the need for blood pressure medication. One study concluded that a person with hypertension who took no medication and lost just 5 percent of 200 pounds, or 10 pounds, could expect a 7-point drop in systolic pressure and a 5-point drop in diastolic. What's more, participants who lost weight and kept it off for three years showed a persistent reduction in blood pressure and were 65 percent less likely to be hypertensive compared to those who didn't lose weight (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, January 2001).

Taking the First Steps

If learning about these health benefits has renewed your motivation to lose weight, Dr. Nicolai and I have put together some advice on how to start losing those extra pounds.

1) Set realistic goals. A reduction of 500 to 1,000 calories a day from diet and exercise combined should result in one to two pounds lost a week. To check your progress, measure your waist. Abdominal or visceral fat puts stress on the internal organs and seems to set in motion metabolic changes that favor the development of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers; fortunately, it's also among the first fat to go when you take weight off the right way.

2) Eat an anti-inflammatory diet. While this diet, which I recommend for everyone, is not specifically a weight-loss plan, eating mainly fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and plant proteins helps reduce your risk of age-related diseases. It optimizes health by stabilizing blood sugar, lowering glycemic load, and adding more fiber and omega-3 fats to your diet. (For more, see my book *Healthy Aging*.)

3) Slowly start to exercise. Begin to walk for 20 minutes each day. You should feel like you're moving briskly, not just strolling. If this is too hard on your joints, try water exercises. As your fitness improves, increase the time you spend exercising and gradually increase intensity.

4) Practice mind-body techniques. Stress is often linked to weight gain. Whether stress brings on weight gain or weight gain causes stress, you need to find ways to relax and tune into your body. Mind-body approaches such as breath work, meditation, yoga, and guided imagery are all helpful.

5) Become a conscious eater. Curb your emotional eating and become aware of situations that cause you to reach for an unhealthy snack or draw your focus away from your meal, such as the television or work. Eat slowly, savoring food's flavors, colors, aromas, and textures. 

Hope for Hepatitis C

As many as 70 percent of the estimated 3.4 million Americans who are chronically infected with hepatitis C don't know they carry the virus, which causes progressive inflammation in the liver. Hepatitis C may not produce symptoms for decades; many people only learn they have it when routine blood tests show elevated liver enzyme levels. In a minority of cases, hepatitis C can lead to permanent scarring and loss of functioning liver tissue (cirrhosis), liver failure, and liver cancer. The virus is spread primarily by contact with infected blood, although sexual transmission is also possible. Anyone who had a blood transfusion before 1992 should ask their doctor about getting tested, as should IV drug users (past or present) and health-care workers exposed to blood or blood products.

Current drug treatment for hepatitis C—a combination of interferon and ribavirin—works well in fewer than half of people with the most common strain of the virus, called genotype 1, and drug side effects include severe flu-like symptoms and depression, making many patients unwilling to complete the course of therapy. I'm more apt to suggest this regimen to those with genotype 2 or 3, strains that are more responsive to the drugs, or to patients found to have significant liver damage on biopsy. If you have only mild liver inflammation, you may want to wait until more effective or less harsh medications become available; several drugs are in development.

Whether or not you choose drug therapy, I suggest the following natural approaches to reduce inflammation and promote liver health. Some ideas are from Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of the Program in Integrative Medicine, who treats many patients with hepatitis C.

Try Chinese herbal formulas. I've encouraged many hepatitis C patients to use herbal formulas developed by Qingcai Zhang, a Chinese-trained MD in New York City who specializes in chronic viral diseases and relies primarily on herbs. Patients typically report lower levels of ALT (a measure of liver damage), plus improvement in symptoms like fatigue, nausea, and poor appetite. Some patients use the herbal formulas instead of interferon/ribavirin therapy, while others say the herbs lessen the drugs' side effects. If you're interested in visiting the Zhang Clinic or getting a phone consultation, write to his clinic at 420 Lexington Ave., Suite 631, New York NY 10170. The herbs are available at hepapro.com, but to find out which ones are best for you, I suggest that you work with Dr. Zhang or read his book *Healing Hepatitis C with Modern Chinese Medicine* (Sino-Med Institute, 2000).

Change your diet. Because extra protein adds to the liver's workload, Dr. Horwitz advises getting only about 15 percent of your daily calories from protein. Avoid fats that promote inflammation, such as trans fats and polyunsaturated vegetable oils. Increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids, which decrease inflammation, by eating salmon or sardines a couple times a week. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables (choose organic when possible) and whole grains to boost your fiber intake. Dietary fiber speeds the elimination of toxins from the body and reduces the liver's detoxification workload.

Does Milk Thistle Help?

Milk thistle is widely used to curb liver disease, but a recent review questioned whether the herb does any good. Scientists looked at 13 clinical trials involving 915 people with liver disease from alcoholism or hepatitis B or C. When all data were included, the remedy seemed to reduce deaths from liver-related causes, but the best-designed studies found milk thistle had no effect on mortality rates or liver complications compared to a placebo (*American Journal of Gastroenterology*, November 2005).

I've seen good results with milk thistle, which contains compounds shown to reduce liver inflammation, protect the liver from toxic injury, and even promote the regeneration of damaged liver cells. While Dr. Randy Horwitz agrees with the review's call for further high-quality clinical trials, he doesn't believe that more research is needed before milk thistle can be recommended. Given the herb's safety and promising findings in some studies, Dr. Horwitz continues to recommend milk thistle to liver disease patients, and I do too.

Milk thistle is fine to use if you're on interferon and is sometimes part of Dr. Zhang's formulas. Look for milk thistle capsules containing 70 to 80 percent silymarin, and take 150 to 200 mg two or three times daily along with olive leaf and schizandra, two other herbs that may help hepatitis and are sold in health food stores; follow package directions.

Take antioxidants. Many hepatitis C patients have low levels of glutathione, an antioxidant that helps the liver break down toxins. Although supplemental glutathione is not well absorbed, you can help your body make this compound by taking other antioxidants like vitamins C and E. Another antioxidant, selenium, may protect against liver cancer. To get these nutrients, take my daily antioxidant regimen: 200 mg of vitamin C, 400 IU of natural vitamin E (or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols), 200 mcg of selenium, and 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids.

Use mind-body therapies. Dr. Horwitz says regular practice of a relaxation method like breath work, meditation, or yoga may help reduce inflammation and allow you to better cope with conventional treatment's side effects. Plus, some patients report hypnotherapy may promote healthy liver function. To locate a hypnotherapist, visit asch.net. One useful self-hypnosis CD is *Hepatitis: Liver Healing* from Steven Gurgevich, PhD; to order, visit tranceformation.com.

Avoid harmful substances. Eliminate alcohol, which is toxic to the liver. If you smoke, quit. Smoking reduces glutathione levels and increases liver cancer risk. Don't take medications that are potentially damaging to the liver, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol); your pharmacist can tell you about others. Pass on kava, an herbal remedy linked to rare cases of liver dysfunction. And avoid exposure to fumes of volatile solvents and contact with pesticides and other poisons. ☯

For more, see *Hepatitis C Choices*, a free guide to conventional and natural approaches that's available at hepcchallenge.org.

Ask Dr. Weil Uterine Fibroids; Pesticides in Produce; & More

I've long suffered from vitiligo. I'm not interested in surgery and have tried cortisone creams and light therapy, but none of it works. Is there an herbal cure?

I wouldn't call it a cure, but in one study of people with limited or slow-spreading vitiligo, a skin condition in which the loss of pigment cells causes patches of extremely white skin, ginkgo was found to slow the progression of the disease in some people, while another 40 percent achieved either partially or completely repigmented skin (*Clinical and Experimental Dermatology*, May 2003). Vitiligo is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks healthy pigment cells. Ginkgo's antioxidant properties may help by preventing free radicals from damaging these cells.

You've already tried the most commonly used and best researched treatments for vitiligo, which are topical ointments and light therapy, often with a type of ultraviolet light called UVA. But you may not have tried a combination of UVA therapy and the ayurvedic herb khella (*Ammi visnaga*), a treatment known as KUVa. One study (*European Journal of Dermatology*, May-June 2001) found that nearly half of patients receiving this treatment reported more than 70 percent repigmentation. Khella may help by increasing the sensitivity of remaining pigment-producing cells to sunlight. Treatment with khella or ginkgo may take several months before noticing benefits.

In addition, my patients have found mind-body methods, like hypnotherapy, guided imagery, and psychotherapy, to be worthwhile. These approaches can help reduce your self-consciousness about your skin's appearance.

Is it possible to completely remove pesticide residue from conventionally grown produce?

Washing and peeling fruits and vegetables can greatly reduce the amount of pesticide residues, but doing so won't necessarily remove all of them. You should wash all produce, whether organically or conventionally grown, before eating. I suggest using a small amount of diluted dish detergent and a vegetable scrubber, followed by a warm water rinse. A 1996 study done at the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas, showed that by washing (and sometimes peeling) produce, pesticides could be removed from nearly half the samples and lowered in the rest by 30 to almost 100 percent.

I recommend eating a variety of organic produce, but if you do buy conventionally grown fruits and vegetables, stick with those least likely to have pesticides on them such as avocado, sweet corn, broccoli, asparagus, bananas, pineapple, and mango. The Environmental Working Group (ewg.org) found peaches, raspberries, strawberries, apples, celery, spinach, potatoes, and sweet bell peppers to be the most contaminated with pesticides when grown conventionally. The three worst culprits were peaches with 45 types of pesticides and sweet bell peppers and raspberries, both with 39. If your food budget allows, purchase organic varieties of the most contaminated produce, as many pesticides are known carcinogens.

I had shingles several months ago and still have sharp pains. What can I do to ease this discomfort?

You're experiencing post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), a complication of shingles that affects the nerve fibers and skin in the area where this viral infection occurred. You may feel a sharp, burning, or aching pain, extreme sensitivity to touch and temperature change, or itching and numbness in the area. While PHN rarely occurs before age 50, people 60 and over have a 50 percent chance of developing it.

I suggest trying acupuncture or hypnotherapy, both of which can help relieve pain. Also, use topical capsaicin after the blisters have healed. This hot-pepper extract, sold over the counter in drugstores, depletes nerve cells of "substance P," a natural chemical that helps transmit pain signals to the brain. Apply a 0.025 percent cream (such as Zostrix) to the affected area up to four times a day. Remember to avoid broken skin and wash your hands afterwards.

Shingles may linger for months or years, is notoriously difficult to treat, and often goes away on its own. But if you call your doctor at the first sign of pain or tingling, a course of antiviral drugs will help reduce symptoms and may stave off PHN if taken in the earliest stage of the infection.

What is your opinion of the South African "tea" rooibos? I've heard it may have more antioxidants than green tea.

Rooibos (pronounced *roy-boss*), which means "red bush" in Afrikaans, is an herbal beverage that isn't a true tea since it comes from an entirely different plant (*Aspalathus linearis*). It has a deep red color, is caffeine free, and is low in tannins, giving it a sweet flavor. But if you want the health benefits of tea, I recommend sticking with the real thing.

Rooibos does have high levels of antioxidants, including aspalathin (which is unique to this plant), but green tea has more antioxidants overall. In South Africa, rooibos has long been used to ease stomach problems (including infant colic), and the alpha hydroxy acids in its leaves may soothe skin irritations when applied topically. In recent years, manufacturers have been promoting rooibos as a miracle tea, but I'm skeptical. The only evidence for its health benefits comes from test-tube or animal studies in South Africa and Japan. In contrast, there is a great deal of scientific research suggesting that people who drink green tea have a lower risk of cancer as well as better bone and heart health.

Are there natural alternatives to treat uterine fibroids?

Yes, there are natural remedies for uterine fibroids, which are common noncancerous growths that develop in a woman's uterine muscles and are stimulated by estrogen. While some women have fibroids that cause no problems, others experience heavy bleeding, pelvic pressure, and recurring pain. To slow fibroid growth and minimize discomfort, I suggest avoiding dietary sources of estrogen by cutting out

red meat, which was associated with a higher risk of uterine fibroids in a study of 2,400 women. Use only hormone-free dairy products and buy organic produce to reduce your exposure to pesticides, which can act as hormonally active agents.

Regular physical activity can also lower estrogen by reducing levels of body fat and cholesterol, both of which help manufacture the hormone. If you have fibroids during menopause, they should go away on their own as natural levels of estrogen are reduced. If heavy bleeding is causing anemia, take steps to improve your iron levels with supplements and foods

rich in this mineral. Finally, consider seeking out alternative practitioners. In a 2002 study of 37 younger women, fibroids shrank or stopped growing in 22 women who were treated with weekly traditional Chinese medicine (consisting of acupuncture, herbs, and nutrition counseling), massage, and guided imagery compared to only three women in a group receiving conventional treatment. **SP**

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Unexpected Findings for Calcium and Vitamin D. Two large studies of postmenopausal women found that taking calcium and vitamin D supplements offered modest benefits in preserving bone mass and preventing hip fractures, but didn't prevent other types of fractures or reduce colorectal cancer risk. Of some 36,000 healthy postmenopausal women, half took 1,000 mg of calcium carbonate and 400 IU of vitamin D as D3 (cholecalciferol) daily for seven years, while the other half received placebo pills. A small but statistically significant increase was seen in hipbone density in women taking the supplements. And women who consistently took the full supplement dose had a 29 percent lower risk of hip fractures. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, February 16, 2006)

Comment: I would have liked to see a different form of calcium used and a higher dose of vitamin D, which is key to absorbing this mineral. Most studies showing a benefit to bone mass have used at least 600 IU of D daily. I recommend 1,000 IU as D3 along with 1,200 to 1,500 mg of calcium citrate a day for women; this form is better absorbed than calcium carbonate. Any cancer-preventive effects might not be seen during the seven-year study period; colon cancer typically takes 10 to 20 years to develop.

Can Saw Palmetto Help the Prostate? A recent study suggests the herb saw palmetto won't help men with moderate to severe symptoms of an enlarged prostate, also called benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH. Researchers followed 225 men aged 49 and older with such symptoms. Half took 160 mg of saw palmetto twice daily for a year, while the other men took a placebo. The herb was no better than the placebo at improving urinary flow or other symptoms of BPH. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, February 9, 2006)

Comment: Many studies show that saw palmetto benefits men with *mild to moderate* symptoms of BPH. In these men, the herb appears just as effective as the drug Proscar, but with fewer side effects. If you have mild to moderate BPH, I'd try saw palmetto at the dosage mentioned above

along with dietary changes (see the October 2000 issue) and regular exercise before resorting to medication. For severe BPH, see a urologist to go over treatment options.

Green Tea Sharpens Thinking. Reducing your risk of cognitive problems as you get older may be as simple as drinking more green tea. A recent study examined the tea-drinking habits of some 1,000 Japanese people aged 70 and older who were given tests for memory and concentration. Researchers found that people who drank at least two cups of green tea every day were 54 percent less likely to have cognitive difficulties than those who had three or fewer cups a week. Drinking only one cup daily also seemed to help keep the brain sharp. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2006)

Comment: The antioxidants in green tea are likely responsible for its brain-protective effects.

Your Brain at Midlife. Gradual changes in brain activity were detected as early as middle age that may help explain why people have trouble remembering things and filtering out distracting information as they get older, says a recent study. Researchers used brain scans to compare the brain function of 12 younger (ages 20 to 30), 12 middle-aged (40 to 60), and 16 older adults (over 65) as they took memory tests asking them to recall words and pictures. Even though middle-age folks did as well on these tasks as younger ones, scientists found the middle-aged brain had decreased activity in an area responsible for concentration, while two other regions that make it harder to ignore distractions stayed activated. This imbalance in brain activity was even more pronounced in older adults, possibly making memory tasks harder with age. (*Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, February 2006)

Comment: Researchers recommend that older adults hoping to concentrate should minimize distractions in their environment and pay attention to one task at a time. I think learning another language can improve attention and memory, because the same brain processes used in becoming bilingual are also needed to stay focused while ignoring irrelevant information. **SP**

Reaping Reiki's Benefits

Nearly 10 years ago, Portsmouth Regional Hospital in New Hampshire began offering Reiki, a gentle hands-on healing practice, as a way to ease anxiety in patients awaiting surgery. Feedback from patients was so positive that Reiki (pronounced RAY-key) was made available throughout the hospital. Ongoing program evaluations have shown patients who received Reiki treatment needed less pain medication and left the hospital sooner. Today, the hospital has a full-time Reiki practitioner and a volunteer corps that provide 2,000 Reiki treatments a year.

I'm pleased that more hospitals are offering Reiki, which involves light hand placements to balance the body's energy flows and strengthen its ability to heal itself. This therapy can have dramatic effects on surgical recovery, says Pamela Miles, a New York-based Reiki master who helped launch Reiki programs at several area hospitals. She often hears doctors remark that patients who had received Reiki are recovering three times faster than usual. I've found it's a useful adjunctive therapy for acute or chronic pain, and I often recommend Reiki to people who are debilitated or recovering from illness or injury.

Reiki began in early 20th century Japan and was introduced here in the 1930s. During a Reiki session, you lie fully clothed on a padded table while the practitioner rests her hands lightly in 12 positions on your head and the front and back of your upper body. She may also place her hands elsewhere to channel energy to painful or diseased areas. You may experience warmth, subtle tingling, or calming, wave-like sensations either where the practitioner's hands are placed or throughout your body. I've had a few Reiki sessions and found them deeply relaxing. A typical session lasts 45 to 90 minutes, although Reiki from nurses or hospital staff is usually shorter.

You can also learn to practice it on yourself by taking first-degree training from a Reiki master. (For referrals, contact the Reiki Alliance at reikialliance.org or 208-783-3535.) This beginning training, which involves 10 to 12 hours of class time and costs anywhere from \$150 to \$300, is all you need to do self-treatment and to share Reiki with family and friends. There is also second-degree training, which involves a similar amount of class time but is typically more expensive, in which you learn how to practice distant, non-touch healing.

Medical Uses That Show Promise

Exactly how Reiki works remains unknown, but research has found decreased levels of stress hormones, improvement in immune response, and reductions in heart rate and blood

pressure. Reiki can be used to address a wide range of physical and mental health concerns. These include:

Chronic pain. Arthritis patients who get regular Reiki treatments often report decreased pain and increased mobility. And researchers are testing Reiki's ability to reduce pain and improve emotional well-being in fibromyalgia patients.

Cancer. Reiki treatments before, after, or even during a session of chemo or radiation therapy may reduce side effects like fatigue and nausea, and once cancer treatment is over, Reiki can help restore balance to the body and shore up its defenses. Researchers are exploring other uses: In one study, advanced cancer patients who received Reiki treatments in addition to opioid drugs to manage pain reported improved pain control and better quality of life (*Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, November 2003). Cleveland Clinic investigators are studying how Reiki affects anxiety and disease progression in newly diagnosed prostate cancer patients.

HIV/AIDS. In a small study of people with HIV/AIDS who received first-degree Reiki training, Reiki was found to reduce pain and anxiety after a single 20-minute session, and self-treatment offered just as much relief as treatment given by another student (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, March/April 2003). Reiki may also help people with HIV/AIDS by enhancing immune function and reducing fatigue and insomnia, common side effects of antiviral drugs. Philadelphia researchers are studying the use of Reiki to promote a sense of well-being in people with advanced AIDS.

Diabetes. Pamela Miles has seen many people with diabetes reduce their need for insulin after starting Reiki treatment, especially those who practice self-treatment on a daily basis. Researchers at the University of Michigan are studying Reiki's effectiveness in reducing pain and improving cardiovascular risk factors in people with diabetic neuropathy (burning or tingling sensations in the feet or hands).

Mental health. In a study on Reiki and depression, people who received a 1- to 1.5-hour treatment each week for six weeks reported reductions in depressive symptoms, hopelessness, and stress. These benefits held up when participants were retested a year later (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, May/June 2004). Reiki treatment also offers a gentle way for people who've been traumatized—by rape, crime, or war—to “reconnect with their sense of wholeness,” says Miles.

To find a professional practitioner, contact the Reiki Alliance. Miles recommends asking a prospective practitioner how long she has been practicing, how many hours of instruction she received, and whether she practices daily self-treatment. 

For more, see Pamela Miles's new book, *Reiki: A Comprehensive Guide* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), or visit ReikiInMedicine.org.

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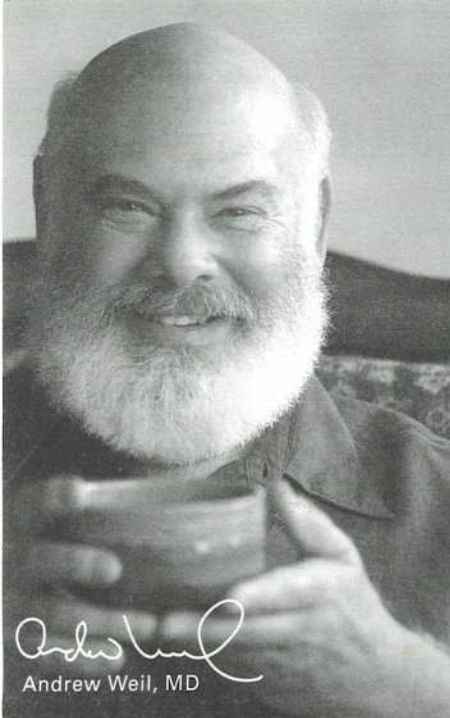
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Andrew Weil, MD

ON MY MIND

Avocados

Sometimes called “poor man’s butter” or the “alligator pear,” the avocado’s reputation as a bad-for-you fruit is undeserved and shouldn’t dampen your Cinco de Mayo celebrations. I consider avocados an interesting addition to a healthy diet, with a fat composition similar to almonds.

Nutrition. The monounsaturated fat in avocado is the heart-healthy kind that can help lower cholesterol. Avocado is also rich in potassium, vitamins C and E, and folate, and studies suggest that eating avocado boosts the absorption of beta-carotene from other foods, likely due to its fat content. Half a medium avocado has about 150 calories.

Tips. Add avocado to salads or use it on toast instead of butter—mash by itself or with lime juice and salt. Some guacamoles have less than two percent avocado, so make your own or buy one listing avocado as its first ingredient. I ripen avocados by placing them in a paper bag with a banana until soft. (The pit can be grown into an attractive houseplant; see thegardenhelper.com/avocado.html for directions.) 

Dr. Andrew Weil’s

MAY 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Five Ways to Make Meditation Easier

Every time someone meditates, the experience is unique. But you may notice recurring obstacles that prevent you from concentrating or meditating altogether. Meditation is simply directed concentration, and you can learn it from books, audio programs, classes, and retreats. Here I’ll discuss some challenges people have shared with me and—with help from Ann Marie Chiasson, MD, who has a private integrative medicine practice in Tucson—offer some practical ways to overcome them.

1 Getting started. Making the commitment to practice is often the biggest hurdle. *Solution:* I recommend people start experimenting with meditation by counting their breaths. To begin the exercise, count “one” to yourself as you exhale. The next time you exhale, count “two” and so on until you are up to five, then go back to one. Do this for 10 minutes. Dr. Chiasson suggests that people tap their toes together to get energy flowing throughout the body for two to three minutes beforehand. Meditate six days a week, for at least five minutes to start. Eventually, try to meditate every day for 20 to 30 minutes.

2 “Monkey mind.” Chasing after your attention and bringing it back to the present moment is the hard work of meditation. *Solution:* It’s a common misconception that meditation is supposed to clear the mind and stop thought. Acknowledge your thoughts and then find a place for them. “I make a little room in my head and take all those parts of my mind that are thinking about my to-do list or a funny story, and I put them in the room and envision them talking to themselves,” says Dr. Chiasson. “This creates space in my awareness, my mind.” Writing your thoughts down on a notepad during meditation, playing background music, or meditating outdoors with the sounds of nature as a backdrop may also work. Mantram, the practice of repeating certain syllables, words, or phrases over and over in the mind, can help unify thoughts and maintain focus.

3 Finding time. Your scattered thoughts can not only hinder concentration, but also distract you from making time to meditate. *Solution:* If I don’t meditate first thing in the morning, before I get caught up in the day’s activities, I tend to not do it at all. Remember, meditation is a discipline that requires practice. Remind yourself why you want to meditate when thoughts like “I’ll do it later” divert your attention. If you don’t have time for a full session, fit in a few minutes.

4 Sitting still. The fidgety feeling in your legs or tingling toes can be distracting. *Solution:* Find a position that is comfortable, whether it’s lying down or sitting in a chair. Practicing yoga is also helpful to ease into stillness since the moves are slow and often require you to hold a pose. While I don’t usually recommend someone start with walking meditation, it’s an option if all else fails.

5 Meditating for today. Your body and mind are unlikely to change radically after weeks or months of meditating, so avoid starting off with unrealistic expectations. *Solution:* Realize that meditation is a long-term commitment to developing consciousness and changing your relationship with yourself. Try to appreciate its immediate benefits, such as relaxation, increased concentration, and more even moods. 

For more, listen to my recording *Meditation for Optimum Health*. To order, call (888) 337-9345 or visit drweilselfhealing.com.

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It's been a rough time for natural products, judging by study results and media accounts of some top-selling supplements. Researchers have found echinacea of little help against colds, melatonin useless for jet lag, and saw palmetto ineffective against an enlarged prostate. Disappointing conclusions were also reported for glucosamine and mild osteoarthritis pain as well as B vitamins for heart health. Yet, some of these outcomes aren't as damning as they seem.

I'm all for rigorous scientific scrutiny of supplements; however, sometimes natural remedies are tested for conditions for which they are not recommended. For example, prior research found St. John's wort effective for mild to moderate depression, yet it was then tested for major depression with much-publicized disappointing results. Saw palmetto was found ineffective for men with moderate to severe symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia, while earlier evidence showed it useful in mild to moderate cases. I detect an agenda by the medical and pharmaceutical establishments to discredit supplements, especially those that compete against profitable drugs.

The research community is still learning how to do clinical trials of natural products effectively and maybe they overshot to begin with, points out Loren Israelsen, executive director of the Utah Natural Products Alliance. He criticized the echinacea trial, saying experts believe a dose three times higher should have been used. These studies confuse people and undermine public confidence in the scientific approach, explains Israelsen. He wants to see the medical, research, and natural products communities talking to one another to get baseline data, establish what's known about supplements, and decide the best ways to design studies.

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's self healing

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Five Remedies for Ringing in the Ears

Everyone has occasional tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. But for 12 million Americans, the noise (also experienced as hissing, roaring, or clicking) is bothersome enough to make them seek medical help. The exact process responsible for these sounds is unknown, but chronic tinnitus may be caused by repeated exposure to loud noise, which can damage or destroy hair cells in the ear canal. Here are my top tips for hushing tinnitus.

Lifestyle. Speak with your doctor to see if changing or reducing medications can make a difference, as tinnitus can be a side effect of some drugs, particularly anti-inflammatories, antidepressants, and aspirin. Eliminate caffeine and nicotine—both may aggravate tinnitus by reducing blood flow to the ear. Keeping high (or abnormally low) blood pressure under control might improve blood flow to the ear. Stress and fatigue can make tinnitus occur more frequently or seem louder, so get enough sleep and use relaxation methods.

Ginkgo. While studies have been mixed, I believe the best supplement to reduce tinnitus is ginkgo, which can increase blood circulation to the head. Take 60 to 120 mg twice a day with meals, for at least two months.

Mind-body techniques. Both hypnotherapy, which is great for stress reduction, and biofeedback, which allows you to read your body's signals to improve health, may quiet tinnitus. In one study, most patients learned to disregard the disturbing noise after one physician visit and four weeks of self-hypnosis with an audiotape. You might try Dr. Steven Gurgevich's self-hypnosis CD for tinnitus (sold at tranceformation.com).

Masking. One conventional treatment is a tinnitus masker, a device that's inserted into and removed from the ear like a hearing aid. The best type produces a frequency opposite to the tinnitus tone, canceling the noise. Speak with your ear, nose, and throat doctor for more information.

Bodywork. Therapeutic yoga can help reduce blood pressure and stress hormones. The Alexander Technique emphasizes proper alignment of the head, neck, and spine, and may improve blood flow to the ear. Cranial therapy may also help: In this healing method, trained osteopathic physicians use their hands to apply gentle pressure to the head and other parts of the body to normalize functioning of the nervous system. ☸

Shopping for Seafood

The fish counter is a complicated place to make buying decisions, admits Marion Nestle, PhD, an expert on nutrition and food policy and author of the new book *What to Eat* (North Point Press, 2006). Reading it is like having a nutritionist at your side in the supermarket. Nestle will be joining me at a public forum on food, politics, and society on April 30 in New York (to buy tickets, call 520-626-2468).

There are some hard choices to make if you like eating fish, as I do. If you're trying to balance the health benefits of omega-3 fatty acids against the risks of methylmercury and PCB contaminants, you have your work cut out for you, explains Nestle. Add ecological concerns about overfishing and sustaining marine life to the mix, and this task might seem daunting. Even so, Nestle makes seafood shopping easier by suggesting six do's and don'ts:

Do use a crib sheet. Whether buying fish or ordering it in a restaurant, there's an overwhelming number of issues to consider—taste, nutrient content, health effects, toxins, environmental effects—and not nearly enough information about them to balance the benefits and risks, says Nestle. Her solution? Take a seafood advisory card with you. "I can't keep these issues straight," she adds, "but that's why the fish cards are so useful. Experts have done the work for you." (See box at right.)

Do question retailers. According to Nestle, you want to know where (in which waters) and when fish was caught, whether it was farmed or wild, and if the store tests it for bacteria, toxins, PCBs, and methylmercury. All of these factors affect taste, safety, and environmental impact. Seafood currently has no USDA standards for the term "organic," so it can be defined however the producer chooses. Find out how your store's supplier defines it.

Do look for country of origin labeling. Seventy-five percent of the fish (and 90 percent of shrimp) sold at supermarkets and restaurants in the United States is imported, with most coming from Latin America and Asia. By labeling or through signage, sellers are supposed to identify the species of fish, whether it was previously frozen, and if it was farmed or wild. In 2005, fish (except for sushi, canned varieties, and processed fish like fish sticks) became the only food required to label country of origin. But compliance is often lax.

Surprisingly, wild fish is labeled by the origin of the fishing boat and not the location where it was actually caught. However, farmed fish is labeled for the country where it was hatched, raised, and processed.

Don't judge fish solely by its color—or label. While fish labeling can be confusing, a *New York Times* food writer set out to determine whether it was honest. In March 2005, she bought eight pieces of wild salmon toward the end of its season (which runs from November to March) from eight different markets. A lab measured whether the salmon had natural (wild) pigments or added coloring (farmed). Only one of the samples was definitely wild, another was a maybe, and the other six turned out to be farm-raised.

Don't assume fish caught locally is safe. In August 2004, an EPA survey revealed that most of the country's lakes and

rivers are contaminated with methylmercury, with 48 states (except Wyoming and Alaska) issuing advisory warnings for residents not to eat fish from certain waters. Nineteen states placed *all* of their lakes and rivers under statewide advisories for fish consumption. Although the EPA contends that levels of mercury emissions have fallen, they say recognition of the toxin's widespread presence reflects more aggressive monitoring efforts. (You can check your state's waterways by visiting epa.gov/waterscience/fish/states.htm.)

Don't forget canned varieties. Since all the sockeye (red) salmon in cans is wild, I recommend it. Also, sockeye are less carnivorous than other species of salmon, so they have lower levels of environmental toxins. Canned fish labels probably accurately reflect what's inside.

I think we should all avoid eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish, fish that are highest in mercury. This is especially important for pregnant and nursing women, mothers-to-be, and young children. Government advisories indicate that these four groups of people can safely eat up to 12 ounces a week of low-mercury fish, but because albacore (white) tuna has nearly three times as much mercury as canned light tuna, you should limit your consumption to 6 ounces weekly, if any. 

Advice Is in the Cards

Seafood advisory cards take the guesswork out of fish buying. Marion Nestle calls them the only practical way to deal with all the bewildering dilemmas about fish. (The seafood industry criticizes these listings for oversimplifying complex issues and being scientifically unsound.) Nestle recommends three guides; all cover environmental considerations, but only one of the websites mentions health risks and omega-3 content.

The **Pocket Seafood Selector** from Environmental Defense lists fish as either eco-best or eco-worst choices and identifies those with the highest levels of PCBs or mercury. You can download a version from oceansalive.org, where you can also find valuable nutrition information about fish, or write to Environmental Defense: Media Department, 257 Park Avenue South, 17th Floor, New York NY 10010.

Seafood Watch contains both nationwide and regional listings from the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California. It groups seafood into three categories that are based on sustainability: Best choices are green, good alternatives are yellow, and fish to avoid are in red. View them at seafoodwatch.org, download a copy, or request one by calling toll-free (877) 229-9990.

The **Guide to Ocean Friendly Seafood** from the Blue Ocean Institute uses a color-coded key to evaluate a species' abundance, fishing or farming methods, and environmental concerns. Download a free copy at blueocean.org or get a printed version by writing Blue Ocean Institute, 250 Lawrence Hill Rd., Cold Spring Harbor NY 11724.

How to Choose a Multivitamin

Multivitamins can offer a lot of nutritional bang for the buck, and I think that everyone should take a good one. Of course, popping a daily multivitamin-multimineral supplement does not give you license to eat poorly. The best way to get all of your daily vitamins, minerals, and other micronutrients is to eat plenty of whole foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. But a multi serves as insurance against nutritional gaps that can show up even in a healthy diet. Population-based studies suggest that taking a daily multi reduces heart attack risk and helps protect against colon cancer, and some studies have found regular use of a multi can boost immune function, especially in older people.

It's especially important for people over 50 to take a daily multi: Up to 30 percent of these folks can no longer adequately absorb vitamin B-12 from food, and the body's ability to make vitamin D on exposure to sunlight declines steeply with age. Also, it's key for any woman who is contemplating pregnancy to take a multi with 400 mcg of folic acid a day. Deficiency in the earliest stages of pregnancy can cause severe birth defects.

Yet, choosing which multi to take can be confusing. When faced with the huge variety of products and different combinations of ingredients, many people simply throw up their hands and buy the most heavily advertised brands. While most multis contain 100 percent of the Daily Value (DV) for key vitamins, these values haven't changed since the 1970s and may not reflect current thinking on the optimal amounts or forms of nutrients to protect against chronic diseases.

Nine Notable Nutrients

Here's my advice on key nutrients in many multivitamins.

Vitamin A. Your multi should not have any preformed vitamin A (retinol). Taking 5,000 IU of retinol—often listed as vitamin A palmitate or acetate—a day has been shown to increase the risk of losing bone density and breaking a hip. (If you have trouble finding a multi without preformed A, at least limit your intake: Walter Willett, MD, who chairs the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health, advises getting no more than 2,000 IU of retinol from supplements a day.) If the label reads "vitamin A as beta-carotene," that's okay. Beta-carotene and other carotenoids, which the body converts to vitamin A, won't harm your bones.

Ideally, your multi will give you a mixture of these protective pigments, including beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, lutein, lycopene, and other members of this family of antioxidants. I recommend taking 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids (or 10,000 IU of beta-carotene) daily from a multivitamin or mixed-carotenoid product. (Taking more than 30,000 IU daily of beta-carotene may increase lung cancer risk in smokers.)

B vitamins. Look for products with 50 mg each of most B vitamins, except for folic acid (at least 400 mcg) and B-12 (at least 50 mcg). If your multi provides only the Daily Value for most B vitamins, I suggest taking an additional B-50 B-complex supplement. Despite recent studies that found taking B vitamins did not reduce the risk of further cardiovascular

problems in people who already had heart disease, it's possible the vitamins have more of a protective effect in those who don't have heart disease.

Vitamin C. You'll want at least 60 mg of this antioxidant, or 100 percent of the Daily Value. For optimum health, I suggest supplementing with 200 to roughly 250 mg of vitamin C daily, which is about all your body can use in a day. So if you are getting only 60 mg of vitamin C from your multi, take another 200 mg of this nutrient.

Vitamin D. Check for at least 400 IU of bone-building vitamin D, or 100 percent of the Daily Value. Yet, I now encourage everyone to supplement with at least 1,000 IU of D a day, the amount shown in recent studies to greatly reduce the risk of breast, colon, and ovarian cancers. If your multi provides only 400 IU, you should take an additional vitamin D supplement to make up the difference. Look for products with the D3 (cholecalciferol) form of vitamin D, which is more readily utilized than D2 (ergocalciferol).

Vitamin E. Your multi should provide vitamin E as mixed, natural tocopherols, not just as d-alpha-tocopherol or, worse, synthetic dl-alpha-tocopherol. Better-quality products will also give you mixed tocotrienols, the other components of the natural vitamin E complex. I suggest supplementing with 400 IU of mixed, natural tocopherols a day, or at least 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols. If your multi contains only the Daily Value of E (30 IU), I advise taking another 400 IU of this antioxidant.

Vitamin K. Because vitamin K, another bone-healthy nutrient, can interfere with blood thinners like Coumadin (warfarin), many multivitamins contain little or none of it. Most people can get enough of this vitamin by eating leafy greens regularly. If you're on a blood thinner, check with your doctor before taking a multi that includes vitamin K.

Calcium. Your multi should provide some calcium, preferably as calcium citrate for best absorption. No once-daily

Should Kids Take a Multi?

I recommend that children take a daily multivitamin-multimineral supplement starting at about age 5, because many kids don't eat enough fruits and vegetables and have diets full of processed foods that may lack the nutrients they need.

Children's multivitamins typically come in chewable form and include sweeteners to mask unpleasant tastes. In general, I think it's better to use a product that's made with natural sweeteners (such as evaporated cane juice) rather than a sugar-free multivitamin made with the artificial sweetener aspartame, which I consider harmful. If your child has food sensitivities, consider getting a multivitamin that contains no artificial colors and flavors.

multivitamin has the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of calcium, 1,000 to 1,200 mg, because this mineral is bulky and the resulting pill would be too large to swallow. So most women and some men will need to take additional calcium to maintain bone health. Most women should take 1,200 to 1,500 mg of calcium a day from supplements. Men should get no more than the RDA for this mineral, preferably from food, since some research suggests a high intake of calcium may increase the risk of prostate cancer.

Iron. Avoid multis with iron unless you're a menstruating woman, pregnant, or have been diagnosed with iron-deficiency anemia. Excessive intake of this mineral from food and supplements might increase the risk of heart disease and cancer.

Selenium. Get no more than 200 mcg of selenium, a key antioxidant mineral. Too much can make your nails brittle or cause your hair to fall out.

Answers to Common Questions

I often get asked these questions on multivitamins.

- *When is the best time to take my multi?* You can take it any time of day, but do so on a full stomach (after a meal) to avoid indigestion. Vitamins D and E and the carotenoids need fat to be absorbed. So don't take a multi or separate supplements of these nutrients with, for example, a low-fat breakfast such as a half grapefruit, a bowl of oatmeal, and tea or coffee. You're better off taking them after a larger meal like dinner.
- *Should I avoid taking my multi with my medications or other supplements?* Iron in a multi can reduce the absorption and effectiveness of thyroid hormone drugs and certain antibiotics, so allow at least two hours between taking such a product and these drugs. Meanwhile, calcium may interfere with iron absorption, so don't take calcium supplements and iron-containing multis within two hours of each other. I'm not aware of any interactions between multis and herbal supplements.
- *What if I have trouble swallowing large pills?* You can use a pill crusher (sold in drugstores) and then mix the contents with soft foods like applesauce to mask any unpleasant tastes. You can look for multivitamins in capsule form: They tend to be smaller and easier to swallow than tablets, but you might have to take several capsules a day to get the same amount of nutrients found in one tablet. Or you can try a liquid, spray, or chewable multi, although they tend to cost more. A drawback of liquids: Many vitamins, particularly vitamin C, begin to break down when exposed to air, so the potency of liquid vitamins might wane once you open the bottle.
- *Are generic multis just as good as name brands?* Quality does not correspond with price, and generic multis are often indistinguishable from brand name products, says Jane Higdon, PhD, a micronutrient expert at the Linus Pauling Institute. Yet, the super-cheap multivitamins that are sold in close-out and dollar stores are best avoided, according to recent testing by *Consumer Reports*. Nearly half of the 18 tested brands failed to contain the labeled amount of at least one nutrient, and several didn't dissolve adequately.

Key Vitamins & Minerals

These are the 10 vitamins and 6 minerals I recommend getting daily from a multivitamin and possibly additional supplements. I typically don't like to suggest specific brands, so use this as a guide when comparing products.

	IN A MULTI	TOTAL DAILY FROM ALL SUPPLEMENTS
Vitamin A as mixed carotenoids or beta-carotene	10,000 IU	10,000 to 15,000 IU
Thiamin (B-1)	50 mg	
Riboflavin (B-2)	50 mg	
Niacin (B-3)	50 mg	
Vitamin B-6	50 mg	
Vitamin B-12	50 mcg	
Folic acid	400 mcg	
Vitamin C	60 to 250 mg	200 to around 250 mg
Vitamin D	400 to 1,000 IU	1,000 IU
Vitamin E	30 to 400 IU as mixed, natural tocopherols	400 IU as mixed tocopherols, or 80 mg as mixed tocopherols & tocotrienols
Calcium	60 to 200 mg	women: 1,200 to 1,500 mg men: up to 1,200 mg from food & supplements
Chromium	120 to 200 mcg	
Copper	0.9 to 2 mg	
Magnesium	30 to 100 mg	
Selenium	up to 200 mcg	200 mcg
Zinc	8 to 15 mg	

- *Do I need a special formula for women, men, or seniors?* No. Women's multis may contain some extra calcium, but most women will need additional calcium supplements. Multis for men or adults over 50 often contain no iron. You can just buy cheaper iron-free multis not labeled for men or seniors.
- *Should I use a once-daily multi, or a product that requires taking more than one pill?* There's no one right answer. Multis requiring one pill a day are convenient and often less expensive, but may not give you optimal doses of as many nutrients. Products needing more than one pill are likely to give you a broader range of nutrients, but they may cost more and you may have to remember to take pills at different times of day.
- *Can I take a multi after the expiration date?* It won't hurt you, but it may not do you as much good either, since vitamins and minerals lose their potency over time. When shopping, check the expiration date, and don't buy a bottle that has more pills than you'll take before the date passes. Exposure to heat may accelerate loss of potency. 

For more, visit the Linus Pauling Institute's Micronutrient Information Center at lpi.oregonstate.edu/infocenter/index.html.

Ask Dr. Weil “Eat Right 4 Your Type”; Zicam; and More

I read about a lawsuit against the company that makes the cold remedy Zicam. What do you think of this product?

I have not found Zicam, an over-the-counter homeopathic nasal spray, to be effective in shortening the duration and reducing the severity of the common cold. Lawsuits have been filed against the makers of Zicam, claiming it caused anosmia (loss of smell). The FDA is examining these reports, but the manufacturers point out that the common cold is known to affect smell, so people using cold remedies are already at increased risk of developing anosmia.

Package directions say to use the nasal spray at the first sign of a cold and then every four hours until 48 hours after symptoms subside. I don't usually recommend taking zinc as a cold remedy. Zicam contains only minute amounts of the mineral. There is no evidence that zinc as lozenges or supplements causes anosmia. Extra zinc may be good for people who eat a vegetarian diet, but even then I think it's best to limit intake to 15 to 30 mg a day as higher levels may depress immunity. If you do take it, zinc acetate and gluconate seem to be the most beneficial forms for preventing sickness. (Zinc gluconate is the form found in Zicam.)

The best way I know to avoid catching a cold is to wash your hands frequently. To treat one, take echinacea or andrographis at the first sign of sickness and eat fresh garlic for its immune-boosting and antiviral properties.

Is it true that eating kelp helps prevent breast cancer?

Possibly, but research is extremely preliminary. An animal study published in the February 2005 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition* suggests that kelp, a type of seaweed or sea vegetable, reduces the amount of estrogen circulating in the body. This finding has opened a new avenue for cancer prevention research because, in humans, less estrogen means less fuel for the development of estrogen-dependent tumors, such as some forms of breast cancer.

Interest in kelp stemmed from a few case studies in which women who took a daily 700-mg seaweed supplement experienced longer, more regular menstrual cycles and their blood levels of estradiol—the most important form of estrogen—dropped significantly. It appears that compounds in kelp compete with estrogen for spots on estrogen receptors in cells, perhaps resulting in lower levels of circulating estrogen to promote tumor growth.

In Japan, brown kelp seaweed (kombu) makes up more than 10 percent of an average diet in the form of soups, sushi, salads, and even raw or dried kelp as a snack. Although this ongoing research is exciting, I don't think women should start eating large amounts of kelp or supplementing with it in hopes of preventing breast cancer. But when eaten in moderation, kelp is a rich source of many vitamins as well as calcium, potassium, and iron. Try using this salty sea vegetable in stir-fries, dried and sprinkled on popcorn, or as a substitute for chicken or vegetable stock in soups.

Two precautions: Buy seaweed from a company that certifies their products are harvested from unpolluted waters. Because kelp contains iodine, people with thyroid problems should consult their doctors before adding it to their diets.

What do you think of “Eat Right 4 Your Type”?

The popular book *Eat Right 4 Your Type* by naturopathic physician Peter J. D'Adamo (dadamo.com) has been around for a decade, but I think the idea of eating or avoiding certain foods based on your blood type is a silly one. Dr. D'Adamo's theory is that “your blood type determines your susceptibility to illness [and] which foods you should eat.”

I have not seen any scientific evidence of a correlation between blood type and dietary requirements, nor is there a basis to support Dr. D'Adamo's claim that different blood types evolved in different parts of the world based on an evolutionary response. For example, he argues that Type O's are descended from hunters and need to eat a lot of animal protein and few grains, while type A's had ancestors who were farmers so they should eat a vegetarian diet and avoid meat and dairy. Although Dr. D'Adamo admits his program was not designed for weight loss, you may shed pounds, he suggests, because “it's tailored to the cellular composition of your body.” I disagree. People might lose weight on his plan, which is broken out by the four different blood types and subdivided into 16 food categories where foods are labeled as “highly beneficial,” “neutral,” or “avoid,” because they are eating fewer calories and changing their diet radically, and not because of eating according to blood type.

Are there alternative treatments for mitral valve prolapse?

Most people require no treatment—conventional or alternative—for mitral valve prolapse (MVP), a condition in which one of the heart's valves fails to close properly, allowing a small amount of blood to flow back through it. This may cause a heart murmur that your physician can hear with a stethoscope, and the diagnosis of MVP can be confirmed by an echocardiogram. The condition typically causes no symptoms or future problems.

However, I advise eliminating all caffeine sources and other stimulants, which can cause heart palpitations. Also, practice a relaxation technique regularly, and supplement with 500 mg of magnesium a day: Both the nerves that coordinate heartbeat and the muscles that contract to move blood through the heart need magnesium to work properly. You can further protect your heart by getting regular physical activity, eating an anti-inflammatory diet, avoiding too much alcohol, not smoking, and maintaining a healthy weight.

People with MVP are sometimes advised to take antibiotics before certain dental and surgical procedures, but I think this is necessary only if an echocardiogram reveals significant mitral valve regurgitation (i.e., when the faulty valve allows larger amounts of blood to leak backwards).

What do you think of inversion therapy?

Inversion therapy uses slanted tables, boots, and various other devices to hang a patient upside down. Since there is scant scientific evidence that it provides anything more than temporary relief for back pain and there is very little research on it, I don't recommend this therapy.

Proponents claim inversion therapy works for back pain because the effect of gravity temporarily lengthens the spine and relieves muscle spasms. Popularized by the 1980 movie *American Gigolo*, in which actor Richard Gere hung by inversion boots and started a fad, this method has been around for centuries. Manufacturers of inversion therapy products also

claim that they improve everything from digestion and hearing to wrinkles and hair loss.

I'm not buying it. If you have back pain, I think a better investment for more lasting results is to read *Healing Back Pain* by John Sarno, MD (Warner, 1991). Although inversion therapy may elongate your spine while you're upside down, the change disappears as soon as you're right-side up again. Side effects of inversion therapy may include headaches, bleeding into the retina, and worsening of high blood pressure and some back problems. **SP**

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Produce's Nutrient Content Drops. America's fruits and vegetables aren't as nutritious as they were 50 years ago, suggest data presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in February. Of 13 major nutrients in produce, six have shown declines since the 1950s: protein, calcium, phosphorous, iron, riboflavin (vitamin B-2), and vitamin C. Declines ranged from 6 percent for protein to 20 percent for vitamin C and 38 percent for riboflavin. A trend toward crops that grow the fastest and biggest may be responsible, since slower-growing crops have more time to acquire nutrients from both the sun and the soil. Declining health of soil in conventional agricultural settings may also be involved.

Comment: This study may offer another reason to favor organic produce. A report out last year found antioxidant levels in organic foods were about 30 percent higher than in conventional foods grown under similar conditions.

Acupuncture for Migraine Relief. Acupuncture—even if it's not done properly—is as effective as common drug therapies for preventing migraines, German researchers found. In the study, more than 900 people who had two to six migraines a month received one of three treatments: 10 sessions of acupuncture, equal time receiving fake acupuncture, or daily drug treatment with beta-blockers, calcium-channel blockers, or antiepileptic medications used to ease migraines. After roughly six months, patients' migraine diaries showed that participants in all three of the groups reported similar improvements and number of migraine-free days. (*The Lancet Neurology*, April 2006)

Comment: Since the participants didn't know if the acupuncture was real or fake and they spent the same amount of time receiving therapy, the positive results from sham acupuncture might be due to the benefits of the practitioner's touch or the placebo effect.

Strength Training Slows Middle-Age Spread. Women who lift weights twice a week for an hour can help prevent middle-age weight gain, suggests research from an American Heart Association meeting in March. The study involved 164 overweight women aged 24 to 44: One group took strengthening classes for 16 weeks with four additional "booster" sessions from fitness professionals, and the other received a brochure recommending regular exercise. After two years, women who did strength training had only a 7 percent increase in intra-abdominal fat, the kind linked with heart disease, compared to a 21 percent increase in those given information only.

Comment: Researchers believe adding muscle mass can help overweight women move faster so they burn more calories. Besides strength training, a study published last summer found that regular yoga practice curbed weight gain, perhaps by increasing body awareness and making people less likely to overeat.

Loneliness Hikes Blood Pressure. Middle-aged adults who feel lonely have blood pressure that's up to 30 points higher than people who aren't lonely, says a recent study. In results that surprised researchers, feeling lonely was identified as a health risk after 229 people aged 50 to 68 completed questionnaires on loneliness, depression, stress, and hostility. Participants also had their blood pressure taken and medical history reviewed.

People who had the highest scores on the loneliness survey had systolic blood pressure (the first number in a reading) 10 to 30 points higher than those with the lowest scores. Blood pressure typically increases with age, but this effect was more pronounced in lonelier people. (*Psychology and Aging*, April 2006)

Comment: The researchers suspect that lonely people tend to cope passively with stress by withdrawing from it and not asking for support, an unhealthy response, while those with a more socially connected outlook deal actively with challenges and problem solve. **SP**

Keeping Knees Healthy

Knees are the body's workhorses, getting their fair share of use, misuse, and abuse. These vulnerable joints can stiffen from arthritis, swell and ache after sports, or get banged around from injuries. Here, along with Russell Greenfield, MD, medical director of Carolinas Integrative Health in Charlotte, North Carolina, and a graduate Fellow of the Program in Integrative Medicine, I'll discuss a few of your knees' closest allies to keep them healthy and strong, so they don't hurt—as much or at all.

Good posture. You might not think of it as a cause of knee pain, but poor posture when sitting, standing, and moving can throw off your body's equilibrium, placing extra strain on the knees. When standing, good posture means holding your head and neck straight, relaxing your shoulders, keeping your knees straight (not locked), and tucking in your stomach and rear. Yoga, Pilates, qigong, and tai chi are all great practices to improve posture and maintain a balanced frame.

If you've had an injury, have your posture and gait examined by a physician or physical therapist, and consider osteopathic manipulation to promote healing. Movement therapies such as the Feldenkrais Method and Alexander Technique can help break unconscious patterns of movement that may be putting additional stress on the joints.

Proper footwear. The feet you were born with and the way you treat them greatly influence how your knees function. Flat-footed or low arches tend to lean the ankle inward, adding pressure on the inside of the knee. High arches do the opposite. If you're unsure about your arch, look at your wet footprints: The thinner the line between the heel and ball of your foot, the higher your arch. Check your shoes for flat feet, which cause more wear on the inside of the sole. Custom-made shoe inserts can often correct these problems.

When buying shoes, choose carefully. Both narrow and wide heels increase knee joint pressure more than 20 percent (*The Lancet*, April 7, 2001). Even inch-and-a-half heels increase the force on the knee and may contribute to knee osteoarthritis (*Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, May 2005). A loss of cushioning in athletic shoes increases the impact on your knees, while poorly fitting shoes throw off your gait. You can find more advice about foot health and shoes, from heels to children's shoes, by visiting aofas.org.

Strong supporting muscles. There are two groups of muscles at the knee: the quadriceps in front of the thigh, which strengthen the leg from a bent position, and the hamstrings, which run along the back of the thigh and bend the leg at the knee. People tend to focus on developing their quadriceps,

while their hamstrings remain weak. To protect your knees, hamstring strength should be somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of quadricep strength. When strength training, if you can do a leg knee extension with 100 pounds, then you should be able to do a leg hamstring curl with 60 to 70 pounds to achieve this desired ratio.

Many women have weak hamstrings, and this—along with women's wider hips that place extra stress on the joints and female hormones that seem to weaken ligaments—may be responsible for the increasing number of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears in female athletes. This injury, which is usually caused by a sudden twisting motion, affects the center of the knee and is two to three times more common in women than men. For more, see *No More Knee Pain: A Woman's Guide to Natural Prevention and Relief* by George Kessler, DO, with Colleen Kapklein (Berkley, 2005).

The right moves. Cross training is key: Alternate running, stair climbing, and other knee-intensive exercises with gentler types of activity, such as water walking and yoga, and do not suddenly lengthen or intensify your workouts; gradually increase them. Before exercising or participating in sports, warm up by walking or riding a stationary bike, then do some stretches to loosen up. Stretching the quadriceps and hamstrings reduces tension on the tendons and relieves pressure on the knees during activity.

When moving, do it properly. Yoga, for example, should never cause you pain. You should rest and breathe into each position, creating balance. Even tending your garden, which may demand your knees go from inactivity all winter to bending and kneeling come spring and summer, can strain your knees. Whenever possible, use a stool or kneepad instead of squatting, which can increase the force on the knee joint up to eight times your body weight.

If you've had a knee injury in the past or have a history of arthritis, Dr. Greenfield recommends hiring a personal trainer for four to six weeks to learn appropriate individualized exercises before jumping into an exercise regimen.

A healthy weight and diet. Eating well and staying active helps keep pounds off your knees. Each extra pound of body weight is equal to 4 pounds of pressure on the knee when walking and 25 pounds when running (*Arthritis & Rheumatism*, July 2005). And a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, oily fish, and plant proteins, along with ginger and turmeric for joint health, can help ease inflammation and related diseases, including osteoarthritis. (For more on the anti-inflammatory diet, see my book *Healthy Aging*.)

Although I often recommend two popular supplements, glucosamine and chondroitin, to people with osteoarthritis to restore damaged tissue and relieve pain, they haven't been well studied for other types of knee pain. **SP**

next issue

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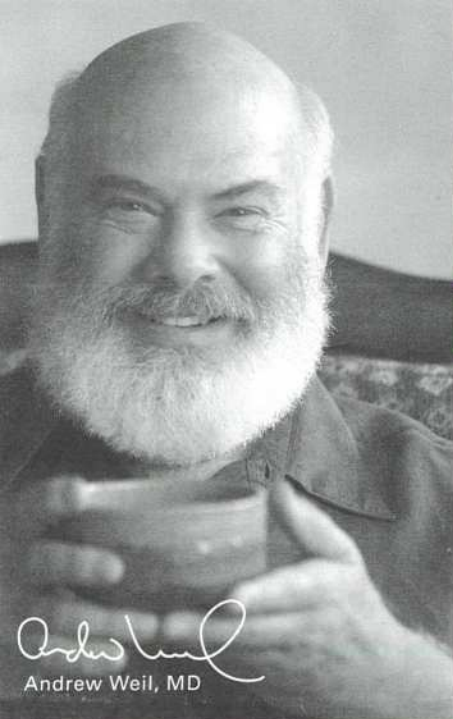
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JUNE 2006

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CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

ON MY MIND

Sunscreen

I'm excited that sunscreens containing microfine zinc oxide, a substance that protects the skin against cancer-causing ultraviolet A (UVA) rays, are now available in drugstores. Unlike the chalky white zinc oxide that life-guards wear, microfine is transparent once applied. And because it's not absorbed, dermatologists consider it a low irritant and often recommend it for children and people with sensitive skin.

What to look for: I use sunscreens that include microfine zinc oxide (also listed as Z-Cote) or Parsol 1789, another UVA blocker, and have a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher to protect against the ultraviolet B (UVB) rays that cause a tan or burn. Even sunscreens labeled "broad spectrum" don't necessarily shield against both types of UV rays, so be sure to read the list of ingredients.

Tips: Apply sunscreen a half-hour before going outdoors and reapply liberally every two hours. If you're also fighting off bugs, put on sunscreen with a higher SPF number first, since repellents may reduce sun protection. ☞

Three New Variations on Walking

Walking certainly isn't new, but that doesn't mean there aren't novel ways to enjoy it. Here are a trio of recent innovations to keep you moving:

ChiWalking. Developed by Danny Dreyer, a nationally ranked ultramarathon runner, ChiWalking adds a mind-body dimension to this physical activity, turning walking from an exercise into a practice, like yoga or Pilates. It combines the principles of tai chi, such as mental focus, with the physical aspects of body alignment, core strength, and balance. The method works for a beginner or a seasoned walker seeking a holistic approach, and can be done outdoors or on a treadmill. Dreyer's book *ChiWalking* (Fireside, 2006) engages body and mind with 12 walks for different purposes (like energizing or calming).

How-to: You'll lean forward slightly when you ChiWalk (chiwalking.com) and use a shorter stride. Unlike regular walking, which primarily involves leg strength and pushing off your feet to move forward, ChiWalking relaxes the lower legs and relies on the tilt of your upper body and rotation of core muscles to lead you. Arms are engaged and your body is more structurally aligned, making movement more efficient. Dreyer claims you can't get bored because you're always working on something, whether it's relaxing your shoulders or keeping your weight forward.

Nordic walking. Also known as fitness-pole or ski walking, Nordic walking is great if you have hip, knee, or leg problems or are unsteady on your feet. It uses lightweight aluminum or carbon fiber poles, which can be bought at a fixed-length or as a telescoping set for traveling. Costing \$65 to \$150 a pair, two popular brands are Leki and Exerstrider. Nordic poles have rubber tips for pavement, which come off to expose metal tips for use on trails, grass, or icy surfaces.

How-to: With shoulders relaxed and a pole strapped in each hand, step forward with your right foot, letting your left arm swing forward to waist height and planting the left

pole near your right heel. The poles should remain pointing diagonally backward, never pointed in front of your body. Then move forward with your left foot, pushing the pole until your right arm is fully extended.

Adding poles to your walking creates variety and keeps it fresh, says Kathy Smith, a California-based fitness expert. Other benefits include less pressure on the back, neck, and shoulders, improved balance and stability, and increased strength and endurance. For more challenges, she suggests adding hills or varying your speed throughout your walk. Because you work more upper body muscles, studies show Nordic walkers burn 20 percent more calories than traditional walkers moving at the same pace. And using poles does not stress the joints the way that walking with arm and ankle weights can.

Podfitness. The newest craze in walking uses digital technology to offer personalized instruction and inspiration for staying active.

How-to: Go to podfitness.com and using an iPod, download walking workouts for \$19.95 a month. First, choose a goal (like building muscle or losing weight). Next, pick a personal trainer. Finally, select the music you'll hear. Press play and you've got a customized workout that changes daily, with music you love and a trainer in your ears counting reps and reminding you about posture and form. Kathy Smith likes Podfitness because you have your own coach to motivate you. ☞

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I've long advised people at risk for heart attack, stroke, and some cancers to speak with their doctors about going on low-dose aspirin therapy. But could aspirin have different protective effects in men and women? A recent analysis of six studies involving some 95,000 people without coronary artery disease sought to answer this question. Aspirin therapy was found to cut men's heart attack risk by 32 percent, but not their stroke risk. In women, aspirin lowered stroke risk by 17 percent, but not heart attack risk (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, January 18, 2006).

I asked cardiologist and aspirin expert James Dalen, MD, MPH, dean emeritus of the University of Arizona College of Medicine, for his thoughts on this analysis. He noted that the only studies involving women used a very low dose of aspirin: 100 mg or less a day. In studies of men, a daily dose of 160 mg (two baby aspirins or half an adult tablet) consistently lowered heart attack risk, and Dr. Dalen believes the same dose would likely offer women the same protection. His recent review of aspirin studies concluded that the optimal daily dose of aspirin to prevent heart attack and stroke in men and women is 160 mg (*American Journal of Medicine*, March 2006).

I hope Dr. Dalen's paper encourages more women at risk for heart disease to consider aspirin therapy. In one study, only 46 percent of women considered at high risk were taking low-dose aspirin, compared to 59 percent of men at similar risk. Since aspirin can worsen certain medical conditions and interact with various drugs and supplements, check with your doctor before starting aspirin therapy. For more, visit aspirin-foundation.com or see *Aspirin: The Story of a Wonder Drug* by Diarmuid Jeffreys (Bloomsbury USA, 2005).



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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A Simple Skill for Relaxation

Mantram is an ancient spiritual practice that is finding modern-day use as a quick, natural, and powerful stress-reduction technique.

What it is. A mantram is a repeated syllable, word, or phrase, such as a brief prayer, to help you calm down and cope with stress. Examples include *Shalom*, *Hail Mary*, or even *Take it easy*. Experts say a mantram is most effective when repeated silently, although it can be chanted, written down, or said while walking. Consider a mantram a "rapid-focus tool," to steady a scattered mind and resist intrusive thoughts that cause anxiety and unhappiness. Repeating one can be like pushing a pause button during a hectic day, or think of it as a comfort word for the mind.

How it's done. Repeat a mantram anytime and anyplace, with as much concentration as possible. Say it when you need help tapping into your patience, strength, or inner calm. Mantram can train the mind to focus attention on the present moment.

How it helps. Mantrams have been used for millennia in most religions, but it can be a secular practice and now has science behind it. Two recent studies looking at its effects on about 100 war veterans and hospital workers

suggest frequent mantram recitation can significantly reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety. "Even after only one week of practice, some participants said they fell asleep more easily, had less irritation, anger, and road rage, and controlled unwanted thoughts," explains Jill Bormann, PhD, RN, a research nurse scientist at the VA San Diego Healthcare System who co-authored both studies. She says using mantrams isn't simply a distraction from stress and thinks the practice is effective because it's portable, personal, immediately available, and requires no training or equipment. I think mantram is especially helpful for people with restless minds and those who have difficulty turning off disturbing thoughts that keep them from relaxing, concentrating, and sleeping.

Tips. Select a mantram carefully. "Avoid words that may evoke a negative association or bad memories," says Bormann. "Choose a traditional one that appeals to you or offers strength and support." Selecting a spiritual phrase may have special power for some, knowing that millions of people use those words. For more, read Eknath Easwaran's *The Mantram Handbook* (Nilgiri Press, 1998). 

7 Substitutes for Sugar

People are born with an innate craving for sweetness, a desire that served our ancestors well: Sugar in the form of ripe fruit or an occasional honeycomb offered them quick energy. But today, when we have easy access to sugary foods and drinks, overloading on them can cause problems, including obesity. Many people turn to artificial sweeteners as weight-loss aids, but I'm not enthusiastic about them. For one thing, there's little evidence they help anyone slim down. Indeed, some research suggests artificial sweeteners may interfere with the body's natural ability to judge a food's caloric content based on its sweetness, making people more likely to overindulge in other sweet foods and beverages. Also, most artificial sweeteners have seemed safe when introduced, only to later prove harmful to health.

I think it's better to consume moderate amounts of sugar than any artificial sweeteners. Sugar is okay in moderation, and it's relatively low in calories (about 15 per teaspoon). For diabetics and others who can't tolerate sugar, I recommend natural sweeteners like stevia and tagatose. (Many products made with natural sweeteners also include inulin, a mildly sweet source of fiber derived from chicory root that also acts as a prebiotic, encouraging the growth of "friendly" probiotic bacteria in the intestinal tract.)

Below I'll share my thoughts about seven sugar substitutes, both natural and artificial.

Acesulfame potassium. Also known as acesulfame-K, this artificial sweetener is about 200 times sweeter than sugar. It's often combined with aspartame or sucralose in diet sodas, chewing gums, and sugar-free gelatins. It's also available as a tabletop sweetener (brand name: Sweet One) and can be used in cooking and baking.

Safety: In one study, female rats fed acesulfame-K were more likely to develop breast tumors (mostly benign, but some malignant) than control rats.

My advice: I'm not convinced of this sweetener's safety and think you're better off without it.

Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal). This controversial artificial sweetener is 160 to 220 times sweeter than sugar and tastes funny to me. It's often in diet beverages and frozen desserts and used as a tabletop sweetener. You can't bake with it.

Safety: In a recent study, rats given modest amounts of aspartame throughout their lives had elevated rates of lymphomas, leukemias, and other cancers (*Environmental Health Perspectives*, March 2006). A new National Cancer Institute study (not yet published) of people aged 50 to 69 found no such link, but it's not known if long-term consumption of aspartame might increase cancer risk later in life. Many people say aspartame makes them feel dizzy or gives them headaches, suggesting it may affect central nervous system activity, and some women find it aggravates PMS.

My advice: I consider aspartame dangerous. Steer clear of it.

Saccharin (Sweet'N Low). The oldest of the artificial sweeteners, saccharin is 300 to 700 times sweeter than sugar. It's found in diet sodas and available as a tabletop sweetener; you can also bake with saccharin. It has a bitter, metallic taste.

Safety: A study by the National Cancer Institute found some evidence of an increased risk of bladder cancer in people who heavily consumed saccharin.

My advice: Avoid it.

Stevia. This noncaloric natural sweetener, which is 250 to 300 times as sweet as sugar, is derived from the leaves of a shrub native to South America. Available as a powder or liquid extract at health food stores and online, stevia can be added to foods and beverages or used in cooking and baking. It has a licorice-like taste. Stevia is technically a dietary supplement because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved it as a safe food additive.

Safety: Despite some experiments linking it to reproductive problems and cell mutations in animals, stevia has a long history of use in humans with no known side effects.

My advice: Stevia is a good option for diabetics and those who can't tolerate sugar, if you don't mind the taste.

Sucralose (Splenda). Introduced around 2000 and now the bestselling artificial sweetener, sucralose is 600 times sweeter than sugar. It's made from sugar molecules that have been altered to prevent their absorption, so it has no calories. Sucralose is found in soft drinks, snack foods, and many other products. It's also sold as a tabletop sweetener and can be used in cooking and baking. In one independent taste test of sugar substitutes, sucralose ranked first.

Safety: In April, the nonprofit group Citizens for Health petitioned the FDA to withdraw its approval of sucralose until there's more research on its safety. According to the group, numerous consumers have reported adverse effects that range from stomach pains and other gastrointestinal problems to headaches and skin rashes.

My advice: It remains unclear whether sucralose is really to blame for these health concerns. I would avoid it for now. If it seems to bother you, certainly don't use it.

Sugar alcohols. These natural sweeteners—including sorbitol, xylitol, erythritol, and others—are roughly 60 percent as sweet as sugar with one-third fewer calories. They're widely used in sugar-free candies, cookies, and chewing gums (they don't promote tooth decay). Some sugar alcohols are available as tabletop sweeteners, and you can cook and bake with them.

Safety: Because they're only partially absorbed by the body, sugar alcohols have little effect on blood sugar levels if used in modest amounts. But they can aggravate irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease and, in high doses, can cause diarrhea.

My advice: If they don't bother your digestive system, I think sugar alcohols are probably fine in moderate amounts.

Tagatose. Made from milk sugar (lactose), this natural sweetener is 92 percent as sweet as sugar, but with only about one-third of the calories. Tabletop sweeteners with tagatose and other natural sweeteners are available on the Internet and also at some health food stores; brands include Shugr, Sweet Fiber, and TheraSweet.

Safety: Tagatose doesn't raise blood sugar levels and is considered safe for diabetics. Because products with tagatose typically include sugar alcohols, they may similarly affect people with digestive problems.

My advice: Stevia and tagatose are my top choices for diabetics and others who can't tolerate sugar. 

The Cancer-Protective Powers of Berries

Fruit sorbet with fresh berries is a great pleasure of mine—a simple, light, satisfying dessert. And knowing these juicy, colorful fruits are low in calories and rich sources of fiber and vitamins A, C, E, and folic acid is reason to indulge. A growing body of evidence shows berries are also packed with protective plant compounds important in aiding our natural antioxidant defenses against cancer. These phytochemicals may help block, suppress, or inhibit chemical reactions that cause cancer to develop or spread.

The idea that what you eat and drink can interfere with the cancer process at many different stages in a tumor's development is intriguing and belongs to a field called chemoprevention. An estimated 35 to 60 percent of all cancers are linked to dietary factors. Berries are a great source of chemopreventive compounds, found in lab and animal studies to inhibit the disease. Human trials are under way in cancer patients and those at high risk, but I think there's already enough evidence to try to make berries a regular part of the recommended daily five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables. And they're virtually labor free—no cooking or chopping required.

The science behind the berry-cancer connection. It seems a wide array of naturally occurring compounds from the juice, skin, and seeds of berries can help prevent the development of cancer, but scientists have yet to pinpoint which berry to eat when. "Although strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, and raspberries are the best studied, we can assume that all berry types are probably good for you and we encourage people to eat them," says Gary Stoner, PhD, co-leader of the Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center's Molecular Carcinogenesis and Chemoprevention Program. "We don't know the most active components, but we know they inhibit the disease process." I spoke with Stoner and a colleague at Ohio State, Christine Sardo, RD, MPH, about such compounds.

Berries are among the richest food sources of antioxidants, compounds that prevent free radicals from damaging DNA in cells that may initiate cancers. When scientists measured the antioxidant levels in foods, beans had the most but wild blueberries were not far behind, and blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries were high on the list as well (*Journal of*

Agricultural and Food Chemistry, June 9, 2004). Rich sources of antioxidants include the red, blue, and purple pigments in berries, called anthocyanins. (The darker the berry, the higher the anthocyanin level.) And other antioxidants, including the flavonoid quercetin, have been shown to inhibit the proliferation of cancer cells in test-tube studies.

Another powerful chemopreventive agent in berries is ellagic acid, present as ellagitannins in the tiny seeds of strawberries, raspberries, black raspberries, and blackberries, which has shown promising results in inhibiting tumor growth in animal and test-tube studies. It seems that ellagic acid works with other compounds in several different cancer-preventive pathways: It acts as an antioxidant, it helps the body deactivate specific carcinogens, and it helps slow the reproduction of cancer cells. Human trials on digestive cancers are currently under way at Ohio State University. Preliminary research led by Stoner and his colleague Laura Kresty, PhD, has already shown that patients who consumed freeze-dried black raspberries daily for six months had lower levels of various markers of oxidative stress, and some had a reduction in lesions in Barrett's esophagus, a precursor condition to cancer. Another trial is looking at the growth of cancer cells in early-stage colon cancer, studying patients who eat 20 grams of freeze-dried black raspberries (equivalent to roughly 2 1/2 cups of fresh) daily for two to four weeks.

In previous studies, Stoner and his colleagues have found that the same form of black raspberries, when added to the diets of rodents, prevented carcinogen-induced esophageal, oral, and colon cancers. In one study, rats that were fed diets mixed with 10 percent freeze-dried black raspberries had 80 percent fewer malignant colon tumors compared to rats that ate no berries (*Nutrition and Cancer*, May 2001). And test-tube studies done by Stoner and other leading experts have shown ellagic acid to prevent cancer cell proliferation in skin, cervical, lung, and breast cancer as well.

Choosing berries. I recommend people eat whole berries instead of taking supplements containing isolated compounds from them, since the fruits' most powerful components may not yet have been discovered. And eat them regularly. Sardo reminds her patients that chemoprevention isn't a temporary thing. "As a preventive strategy, this is a lifestyle approach," says Sardo. "I recommend 1 1/2 cups a day." Also, buy organic when possible, since berries tend to be high in pesticides and organically grown berries may have up to 50 percent more antioxidants than conventionally grown ones (*Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, February 26, 2003).

Keep berries refrigerated in a shallow dish lined with a paper towel. Berries also freeze well, although the contents of vitamins C and E may suffer, says Stoner. Place berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet, freeze for a couple of hours, then transfer to a freezer-safe container. This keeps the berries separated so you can remove as many or as few as you like. Buying frozen berries is another good option. They have virtually the same levels of nutrients as fresh, are available year-round, and will last up to a year in the freezer. 

Up-and-Coming Berries

I enjoy all berries and look forward to trying new ones, especially when I travel since many varieties are regional. On a recent trip to Oregon, I enjoyed boysenberries, a large reddish-purple fruit, and loganberries, a cross between a raspberry and blackberry. USDA researchers have found that "purple berries" including elderberry, black currant, and chokeberry are particularly high in antioxidants, and predict more products containing them will hit markets (*Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, December 29, 2004).

Natural Skin Care Advice

Your skin's outward appearance reflects your body's inner health. But skin is often considered just a protective covering that gives away your age rather than an organ revealing your physical and emotional well-being. Genes and lifestyle factors are the two greatest influences on how quickly and dramatically skin ages. (Hormone levels, many of which can decline with age, also affect your skin.) While you can't control heredity, your skin's looks and radiance are affected by how well you take care of yourself. I'll explain my inside-and-out approach to integrative skin care.

Protecting your skin from within: A glowing, youthful complexion begins with sensible health habits, especially good nutrition. When your daily diet contains antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables, beans, and whole grains, and especially foods providing adequate amounts of healthy fats, like monounsaturated fat from olive oil and omega-3 fatty acids from salmon, walnuts, and ground flax seeds (or from supplements), it not only nourishes the skin but also prevents inflammation, a root cause of aging skin and age-related diseases. Shoring up your antioxidant defenses may help prevent sun- and age-induced skin damage, while omega-3s are vital components of skin cell membranes.

As for lifestyle factors, smoking causes premature aging of the skin similar to sun damage, leading to more wrinkles, especially around the mouth and eyes. Exercising regularly invigorates circulation to the skin, and managing stress lowers cortisol levels, which helps prevent inflammation and preserve collagen. Plus, get plenty of sleep (the natural repair systems of the skin need rest so cells regenerate properly) and water (dehydration makes skin look sallow), every day.

Outward defenses: Many people turn to skin care products to reverse the outward signs of aging, but in my opinion, that should be secondary. If you look after your health, both you and your skin will age gracefully. Skin becomes thinner, less elastic, and drier with age, as its oil production decreases and cell turnover slows. To prolong your skin's elasticity, apply sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher even on cloudy days, use less abrasive products and apply a moisturizer daily, avoid smoking, and drink plenty of water, says dermatologist Jeanette Jacknin, MD, author of *Smart Medicine for Your Skin* (Avery, 2001). Overexposure to the sun promotes wrinkles by speeding up the breakdown of collagen and elastin, two proteins that give skin its strength and resilience, and also by reducing hyaluronic acid, a substance that helps skin hold in moisture. Excessive environmental exposure to wind, cold, dryness, pollution, and toxins can also age skin.

To minimize free-radical damage that can weaken structural components in skin, many topical products attempt to replenish the antioxidants depleted in skin by sunlight, pollution, and smoke. Although antioxidant-laden products are no substitute for sensible sun protection, here is a rundown of some common ingredients. I would avoid products containing phthalates (plasticizers used to soften skin that may

Taking Your Sun History

Dermatologists have long thought that by age 18, most people have received about 80 percent of the sun damage they'll get in their lifetime. But some scientists challenged this idea and found skin damage didn't primarily occur at younger ages. They recalculated the total sun exposure of Americans and found that by age 18, people get only 23 percent of their lifetime UV dose; by 40, it's roughly 46 percent, and by 59 it approaches 74 percent (*Photochemistry and Photobiology*, April 2003). To see what skin would look like without sun damage, check your derriere.

increase reproductive problems) and parabens (preservatives that may penetrate breast tissue by mimicking estrogen).

- *White and green tea.* Both white tea extracts, which have higher levels of polyphenol compounds, and green tea extracts have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. There's some evidence white tea may protect against sun damage and boost immune function when applied to skin, and lab studies suggest green tea may protect against skin cancer.

- *Coenzyme Q10.* This antioxidant involved in cellular energy production is thought to penetrate skin cells deeply to help encourage their turnover, protect them from UV damage, and minimize wrinkles. One German study found that when applied daily to crow's feet (eye wrinkles) for 10 weeks, CoQ10 reduced their depth by more than 40 percent.

- *Antioxidant vitamins.* Vitamin A as retinol is an over-the-counter compound that's less potent and gentler than topical prescription retinoids like Retin-A, which may help reduce wrinkles by stimulating collagen production, lighten age spots, and improve rough skin by causing dry cells to slough. Prescription retinoids can irritate the skin at first, should be avoided during pregnancy, and may be as effective at lower concentrations (.02 percent) as higher. Vitamin E may help prevent wrinkling, but human studies are few and show only slight improvements. Also, the forms of vitamin E commonly used might be poorly absorbed by skin. Topical vitamin C may influence collagen formation, possibly improving skin's texture and firmness and helping protect it from sun damage.

- *Mushrooms.* I collaborated with Origins to develop a unique line of topical skin products and oral supplements that take advantage of the anti-inflammatory properties of several species of Asian mushrooms and other plant-based ingredients. They're not meant as anti-aging products, but are designed to optimize the body's health and defenses, reduce redness, and contain chronic low-level inflammation.

- *Others.* Soy provides nourishing protein and plant-based estrogens, and is often added to moisturizers. It's thought to reduce wrinkles by binding to water molecules in the skin. Products containing oatmeal also help skin cells retain moisture and can soothe irritated skin. ☞

To learn the safety of more than 14,000 skin and other personal care products, see the Skin Deep feature on ewg.org.

Ask Dr. Weil Anti-Cholesterol Spreads; Nasal Polyps; & More

I have nasal polyps. My doctor says I need surgery, but I'm reluctant. What else might relieve the symptoms?

Although surgical removal of nasal polyps may be effective, there is a 40 percent chance of recurrence after the procedure so I recommend it only as a last resort. Instead, I suggest that people address the underlying cause and try natural approaches to relieve their symptoms.

These noncancerous growths form in the mucous lining of the nose or sinuses, often as a result of chronic inflammation. They're common in people with asthma, allergies, and frequent sinus infections. Treating these problems may prevent polyps. Many medications that contain aspirin or related medications may also cause polyps, so read product labels carefully or talk to your pharmacist. And avoid the artificial dye tartrazine (called "yellow no. 5" on food labels), which can increase nasal irritation.

Lifestyle changes can also help. Purchase an air filter for your home, limit or eliminate dairy products, which may increase mucus production in some people, and practice rinsing the nasal passages with a saltwater solution two or three times a day to rid your nose of buildup and soothe swollen membranes. To make a solution, dissolve one-quarter teaspoon of salt in one cup of warm water. I prefer to pour the water into my cupped hands and then inhale it through my nose, but you may also use a rubber syringe or a neti pot (a spouted container sold in health food stores). Inhale through one nostril at a time and make sure to get enough water in so you can spit it out your mouth.

I have a hyperactive thyroid and an enlarged gland. Is radioactive iodine safe? Are there other alternatives?

For people with hyperthyroidism, a condition in which the thyroid gland releases excessive amounts of thyroid hormone, radioactive iodine is often the only option and a good one in my opinion. This treatment, taken as a capsule or drink, is given to patients at a hospital. Radioactive iodine helps to shrink the gland and permanently reduce its hormone output within two to four months. Since the thyroid gland is the only area of the body that uses iodine, it doesn't travel to other areas and the excess is eliminated in the urine within two to three days. Studies have not shown that radioactive iodine increases the risk of cancer, although patients may develop an underactive thyroid gland, or hypothyroidism, soon after treatment or several years later. Radioactive iodine should not be used while pregnant or nursing.

Other anti-thyroid drugs, such as propylthiouracil and methimazole, may be prescribed instead of radioactive iodine to help prevent the thyroid gland from producing excess amounts of hormones. However, treatment usually lasts for a year or more and relapse is common. The herb bugleweed (*Lycopus virginicus*) and its European counterpart, gypsywort or gypsyweed (*Lycopus europaeus*), have shown some promising results for mild hyperthyroidism. The dosage must be

adjusted based on thyroid hormone levels, but these herbs should not be used by people like yourself, who have an enlarged thyroid gland, and shouldn't be taken with other medications or while undergoing tests.

Do cholesterol-lowering spreads like Benecol and Take Control contain trans fats? If so, are they still helpful?

Both Benecol and Take Control contain small amounts of trans-fatty acids, but you might never know this from looking at the nutrition labels for these soft margarines. Food and Drug Administration guidelines allow manufacturers to claim zero grams of trans fat when a product has less than .5 gram per serving. Sold at many supermarkets, both spreads recommend using at least two one-tablespoon servings a day to get the cholesterol-lowering benefits of added plant sterols. Even though the amount of trans fat per serving is small, I think you should avoid all products containing them.

Sterols occur naturally in small amounts in foods such as vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and whole grains. Research shows that as part of a low-fat diet, consuming 2 grams of plant sterols a day can block LDL ("bad") cholesterol from being absorbed and reduce levels by over 12 percent. A good way to get more sterols is to use sterol-fortified products other than margarines. Eight ounces of Minute Maid Premium Heart Wise orange juice has 1 gram of sterols. Research suggests plant sterols may have the most benefit for people with borderline high cholesterol (levels between 200 and 239) who are also taking cholesterol-lowering statin drugs. Check the label on any sterol-fortified product before you buy it to be sure it has no partially hydrogenated oils, or trans fats.

What do you think of giving infants gripe water for colic?

Gripe water is a popular liquid remedy for colic, especially in England. The product is typically a mixture of herbs and herbal oils thought to improve digestion, reduce muscle spasms, and calm an infant. Since I have no personal experience with it, I asked two experts who do.

Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of education and botanical studies at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, tells me that the ingredients in gripe water vary around the world. Most often it has chamomile, fennel, and sometimes anise, all used as folk remedies to calm cramping and gassiness in the digestive system. Sold in bottles online or at health food stores, gripe water may also contain baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) to reduce stomach acidity, which Dr. Low Dog says to avoid as a colic remedy; sucrose to enhance its taste (fructose might be better); and preservatives. Tucson-based integrative pediatrician Sandy Newmark, MD, says there's no research on gripe water's effectiveness, but it's safe, worth a try, and parents rave about it.

Dr. Low Dog says it's very important to breast or formula feed first so babies get their needed calories, and then offer a small amount of gripe water, a half ounce or so at the end of

the feeding. Instead of herbal combinations like gripe water for colic, she says it's probably better to use a single herb, such as chamomile or fennel, in glycerite form that's given by the dropperful or added to water.

What's your opinion of the supplement Avé, which is supposed to help cancer patients?

I have no experience with this product, so I asked Georgia-based radiation oncologist Matt Mumber, MD, author of *Integrative Oncology: Principles and Practice* (Taylor & Francis, 2006). He says Avé (called Avemar outside the United States) is a fermented wheat germ extract that's standardized for compounds called methoxy-substituted benzoquinones that may help the body's natural killer cells recognize and destroy malignant cells. These compounds may also inhibit cancer cells' use of glucose to grow, resulting in cell death. (Ordinary wheat germ lacks Avé's active ingredients.) Available online as

a powder to be mixed with water and drunk once daily, Avé is expensive: A one-month supply of premeasured packets costs \$180. Dr. Mumber says more research is needed before he would recommend the supplement as an alternative cancer treatment or adjunct to conventional treatment since it is not yet known whether it could interfere with chemo or radiation therapy. But he thinks it's reasonable to use Avé for supportive care to improve quality of life in patients not undergoing active conventional therapy, and adds that it might be worth trying by those with advanced cancers seeking to prevent recurrence after conventional therapy.

Also, I typically recommend immune-boosting mushroom extracts such as MycoSoft Gold or Stamets 7 from Fungi Perfecti (fungi.com) to anyone with cancer. Dr. Mumber says Avé and mushroom extracts can be taken together. 

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Diet Cuts Alzheimer's Risk. The closer you stick to a Mediterranean-style diet, the lower your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, says a study of 2,200 New Yorkers over age 70. No one had dementia when the study began, but four years later, there were 262 cases of Alzheimer's. The fewest cases were seen in people who ate a Mediterranean diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, fresh fish, and olive oil. (*Annals of Neurology*, April 18, 2006)

Comment: This is the first study to look at the benefits of a Mediterranean diet for Alzheimer's prevention. The Mediterranean diet is similar to the anti-inflammatory diet I recommend for healthy aging.

Fiber Fights Heart Disease, Diabetes. Upping your fiber intake can help lower levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of inflammation linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. In a yearlong study of 524 healthy adults aged 20 to 70, people who ate the most fiber (more than 22 grams a day) were 63 percent less likely to have high blood levels of CRP (above 3 mg per liter) than those with the lowest intake. Researchers don't yet know why fiber may reduce inflammation. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, April 2006)

Comment: I generally recommend that adults try to eat 40 grams of fiber a day to reduce the risk of chronic disease (almost double the amount that produced protective effects in this study). You can do this by increasing your consumption of fruit (especially berries), vegetables (especially beans), and whole grains. For more information on C-reactive protein, see the April 2005 issue.

The Latest on Estrogen Therapy. For women who have had a hysterectomy, taking estrogen alone does not appear to increase the odds of breast cancer and may even protect against this malignancy, reports a recent study. An analysis of data from the Women's Health Initiative study of nearly 11,000 postmenopausal women found that those who no longer had a uterus and took estrogen as Premarin daily for about seven years didn't have an overall increase in breast cancer risk compared to women taking a placebo. Yet, researchers noticed an increased risk for abnormal mammograms among women taking estrogen. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 12, 2006)

Comment: Previous studies have found that taking estrogen alone protects bones but seems to increase the risk for stroke, blood clots, uterine cancer, and memory problems, so use it at the lowest dose for the shortest time possible to relieve menopausal symptoms.

Fish Oil Reduces Back Pain. The omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil seem to help some back pain sufferers do away with prescription nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). In a study of 125 people taking NSAIDs for nonsurgical neck and back pain, 59 percent reported discontinuing their NSAIDs after less than three months of taking between 1.2 and 2.4 grams of fish-oil supplements containing the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. Sixty percent stated that their overall pain and joint pain had improved. (*Surgical Neurology*, April 2006)

Comment: This is not surprising and is good evidence of the anti-inflammatory effects of omega-3 fatty acids to relieve pain. In general, I recommend that everyone, if they're not eating oily fish at least twice a week, take 1 to 2 grams of supplemental fish oil a day. 

5 Useful Ayurvedic Herbs

India has been called the botanical garden of the world, and rightly so: More than 6,000 plants in this country are used for medicinal purposes, and botanical remedies are an important component of ayurvedic medicine, the traditional healing system of India. For instance, ginger, turmeric, and boswellia are widely used in ayurvedic medicine to treat arthritis and other inflammatory conditions, and ongoing research at the University of Arizona is exploring how they work (ginger and turmeric appear to be much better anti-inflammatory agents than boswellia).

While little researched outside of India, I think the therapeutic potential of ayurvedic herbs is great. Let me tell you about some others I often recommend and that look promising. All are available at health food stores and online. Give any of these remedies a six- to eight-week trial.

1 Ashwagandha. This shrub (*Withania somnifera*) is also known as "Indian ginseng," although it's unrelated to true ginseng. Like ginseng, ashwagandha appears useful as a general tonic to promote strength and stamina, boost immunity, and increase the body's ability to deal with stress; it's also valued as a sexual enhancer, mainly for men. But ashwagandha is less expensive than ginseng, and unlike that herb, it has a calming, mildly sedative action rather than a stimulating one. A typical dose is 500 to 1,000 mg of an extract standardized to 1.5 percent withanolides. Avoid its use during pregnancy.

2 Gurmar. Extracts of the leaves of this climbing vine (*Gymnema sylvestre*) have been shown to lower blood sugar levels in people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. One explanation is the herb may increase the pancreas's production of insulin. Nicknamed the "sugar destroyer" because chewing the leaves of gurmar blocks sweet tastes in the mouth, the herb is often promoted as an appetite suppressant and weight-loss aid, but there's little evidence that taking gurmar supplements can deliver these benefits. To lower blood sugar levels, I suggest taking 400 to 600 mg daily of an extract standardized to 25 percent gymnemic acid. Diabetics who are using prescription drugs to regulate blood sugar should tell their physicians before experimenting with gurmar, as medication dosages may need to be adjusted.

3 Holy basil. This herb (*Ocimum sanctum*) is considered sacred in India, where it's known as *tulsi* and is often planted around Hindu temples. Holy basil contains compounds that act as COX-2 inhibiting anti-inflammatories, which may be why it's long been used to treat pain and arthritis. I also think that holy basil's anti-inflammatory properties may increase the skin's defenses against aging, so I've included it in both

topical and oral skin-care products I've developed for Origins (origins.com). Plus, I know other integrative physicians who recommend the herb to calm the mind. If you'd like to try holy basil to promote calmness or treat arthritis, a typical dose is 400 to 500 mg of an extract that's standardized to at least 2 percent ursolic acid, twice a day.

4 Neem. In rural areas of India, twigs of the neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) serve as natural toothbrushes: People soften them by chewing one end and then rub them around the gums and teeth. Neem kills germs, and recent studies in India show that dental gels containing neem extract inhibit the formation of plaque and benefit gingivitis. You can find toothpastes with neem (sometimes combined with tea tree oil, another natural germicide) at health food stores. I use neem in my garden: Neem oil is one of the best natural pesticides and is nontoxic to humans. Neem-based pesticides are available at organic gardening supply stores.

5 Triphala. I often recommend this mixture of three fruits to people with chronic constipation. It's a superior bowel regulator that tones the muscles in the large intestine without acting as an irritant laxative. Triphala is meant for regular use, not for symptomatic treatment, and its benefits may accumulate the longer you stay on it. Take only capsules of triphala; the powdered form is very bitter and sour. Follow package directions. While this remedy is generally safe, it's not recommended during pregnancy.

By the way, I no longer recommend the ayurvedic herb guggul (*Commiphora mukul*) or its derivative, guggulipid, for lowering cholesterol. Despite promising early research, a more recent study found a small increase in LDL ("bad") cholesterol among people taking the remedy, and I now believe red rice yeast supplements are better for cholesterol control. Also, while the Indian herb gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*) has a reputation for improving memory and increasing mental alertness, I haven't found it effective for these purposes.

A Note of Caution. Ayurvedic herbs produced by US companies appear safe, but I'm wary of remedies made in India and imported into the United States. When I visited herbal companies in India, the sanitary conditions in some were terrible. In addition, imported products may be contaminated with heavy metals. Boston researchers found that out of 70 ayurvedic herbal remedies bought in ethnic Indian stores (all were manufactured in South Asia), 14 contained lead, mercury, or arsenic at levels that could be harmful (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 15, 2004). 

To learn more about these and other herbs, see *The Yoga of Herbs: An Ayurvedic Guide to Herbal Medicine* by David Frawley and Vasant Lad (Lotus Press, 2001).

next issue

Arthritis Supplements

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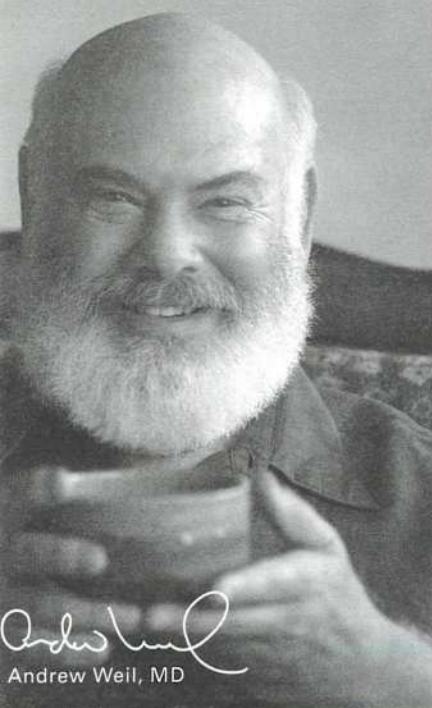
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Dr. Weil and his staff cannot respond personally to letters, but will answer selected health questions in *Self Healing*.

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ON MY MIND

Tasty Iced Tea

The sun shines in Tucson on average 350 days a year, providing ample opportunity to brew sun tea. Mellow than teas that are steeped in boiled water, this thirst-quenching cold beverage is perfect for a hot summer's day.

My favorite blends. Use 1/3 to 1/2 cup loose black tea (such as Assam), several mint sprigs, and the peel from one organic lemon. Chamomile also makes a refreshing sun tea.

Kid-friendly version. Instead of giving children sweetened fruit drinks, combine 1/2 cup dried hibiscus flowers (or use red or berry zinger tea), a couple of cinnamon sticks, some mint sprigs, and the peel from one organic lemon. Serve unsweetened or add honey, maple syrup, or sugar after it sun brews.

How-to: Place loose ingredients in cheesecloth and tie, or add them to the bottom of a gallon-sized glass jar; fill with water and cover with lid. Set outdoors in direct sun until it turns a dark, rich color (two to five hours). If necessary, use a sieve to strain the tea into a pitcher. Refrigerate and serve over ice.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

JULY 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

How Healthy Is Your Breathing?

Unless you have a breathing disorder or a yoga instructor is leading you through a breathing exercise, you may give little thought to how you breathe. But consciously regulating your breathing can neutralize stress, lower blood pressure, and improve digestion, among other health benefits. I encourage you to check in with your breath throughout the day to detect bad habits and adopt healthier ones. I'll describe four breathing blunders and offer solutions.

Upper-chest breathing. Emotional stress can tighten muscles throughout the body, including your chest. This can limit the ability of your lungs to expand fully when you inhale, so you take rapid, shallow breaths that fill only the upper half of your lungs, and less oxygen gets delivered to the body. *Remedy:* Breathe abdominally. When you breathe in, you want your belly to expand rather than your chest. Place a hand on your abdomen and take a slow, deep breath, imagining that your belly is a balloon you're filling with air. Feel your hand rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. With practice, you can train yourself to breathe from the abdomen most of the time, even when you're asleep.

Irregular and noisy breathing. When you are feeling angry, tense, or upset, your breathing is certain to become more rapid, shallow, noisy, and irregular. This sort of inefficient respiration reduces the amount of oxygen you take in and can heighten your distress. *Remedy:* Make your breathing slower, deeper, quieter, and more regular whenever you think of it. This is a simple way to promote relaxation, and making these subtle changes may greatly enhance your ability to level out an uneven mood or deal with upsetting situations. It's impossible to be upset when your breathing is slow, deep, quiet, and regular.

Insufficient exhalation. If you watch people breathe, you'll see that most of them use effort to inhale but none to exhale. As a result, exhalation is usually passive and takes less time than inhalation. When you breathe

this way, you don't move nearly as much air in and out of your lungs as you could.

Remedy: Squeeze out more air. Try taking a deep breath, letting it out effortlessly, and then pushing more air out of the lungs. You should feel the effort in the intercostal muscles between your ribs. Try to make your exhalation as long as or slightly longer than inhalation. Whenever you think of it, practice this technique of extending exhalation.

Mouth breathing. It's best to breathe through your nose. The hairs that line the nostrils help cleanse the air you take in by filtering out dust and dirt particles. When you breathe through your mouth, you may take in large volumes of air very quickly, which some breathing experts say can upset the correct balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood. And my mentor, osteopathic physician Robert Fulford, believed air must contact the sensory nerves in the nose in order to stimulate the brain and promote optimal functioning of the nervous system. *Remedy:* Close your mouth. If chronic sinus problems keep you from breathing through your nose, get proper treatment. I have also found that working with a practitioner of cranial osteopathy can be helpful for disordered breathing patterns.

For more, listen to my recording *Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing*. To order, visit drweilselfhealing.com or call (888) 337-9345.

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In the May 8, 2006 issue of TIME magazine honoring this year's most influential people, I profiled Richard Davidson, PhD, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His best-known work deals with neuroplasticity, the capacity of the brain to develop and change throughout life.

Scientists once thought the brain changes little after childhood, but we now know that how you use your brain can modify its structure and function. A London taxi driver, who must learn the city's maze of streets, tends to have a larger hippocampus—a brain area key to memory—than workers in many other occupations. People who lose vision after a stroke can now regain some by playing special computer games that train healthy brain cells to do the jobs of damaged ones.

Davidson has shown precisely how meditation changes brain function. Using EEGs and brain scans, he's compared the brain activity of Tibetan Buddhist monks—whom he calls “the Olympic athletes of meditation”—to that of beginning meditators as they practiced a “loving-kindness” meditation. The monks showed greater increases in gamma waves, the type involved in attention, memory, and learning, and they had more brain activity in areas linked with positive emotions like happiness. Monks who had spent the most years meditating had the greatest brain changes.

“Based on what we know about the plasticity of the brain,” Davidson says, “we can think of things like happiness and compassion as skills that are no different from learning to play a musical instrument or tennis.” Like any skill, cultivating positive emotions takes practice, but because “our brains are built to change in response to experience, it's possible to train our minds to be happy,” he suggests. For more, visit psyphz.psych.wisc.edu.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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Four Water Workouts Making a Splash

Swimming is a refreshing way to cool off from the summer swelter. I'll take a dip in my pool (it's disinfected with a copper-silver ion generator instead of chlorine, which I consider toxic), start doing the crawl stroke, and my tensions fade away. But lap swimming and water aerobics are not the only options for getting wet and staying fit. Here are four newer water-based workouts, all worth taking the plunge.

Water walking. Boost your aerobic capacity by walking forward, backward, or sideways in waist- to chest-deep water and tone lesser-used muscles in your legs and core. With each step, water's buoyancy supports your weight, easing the stress on joints as your arms push against this resistance. Shortening or lengthening your stride or changing pace adds variety; lifting your knees higher adds intensity. Holding water dumbbells increases upper-body benefits.

Water running. This challenging cardiovascular activity offers a full-body workout that's gentler on joints than pounding the pavement. Once reserved for athletes nursing foot, back, and knee injuries, deep water running has caught on as a cross-training

method for anyone wanting to maintain conditioning or build endurance. While you're wearing a flotation belt or vest (and often an elastic tether), start by running in place while leaning forward slightly.

Water yoga. The aquatic version also includes a physical component, breath work, and relaxation. Standing *asanas* like the tree or warrior pose are easily adapted for waist-high water, while others like sun salutation are modified. Poses requiring more balance on land might seem easier in water because the medium helps support the body and build strength. Warmer water also loosens muscles, allowing you to hold poses longer.

Water tai chi. Sometimes called *ai chi*, this Chinese martial art is well suited to water's natural resistance, which provides the drag and viscosity for its slow, flowing movements. Done standing in chest-high water, *ai chi* emphasizes balance and posture, helps improve range of motion, and offers people with arthritis another great form of water exercise. Water shoes provide better traction as your legs, arms, and torso move through the postures, some of which have been simplified from land-based versions. 

Evaluating Popular Osteoarthritis Supplements

People often turn to arthritis drugs to ease the pain of inflammation caused by the breakdown of bone-protective cartilage in the joints. But natural supplements may not only help relieve pain as well as drugs, they may also slow the progression of the disease. I'm growing more concerned about the side effects of Celebrex and other prescription COX-2 inhibitors used to treat arthritis, and I think it's best to avoid or reduce your dependence on this class of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Last year, the Food and Drug Administration requested that all marketers of prescription COX-2 inhibitors revise their labeling to warn consumers of the potential increased risk of cardiovascular events and gastrointestinal bleeding.

Below I discuss natural supplements for osteoarthritis, beginning with the ones I most often recommend. Try one at a time to see what they do for you, then feel free to combine products. You should also take 1 to 2 grams a day of supplemental fish oil (Nordic Naturals makes a good liquid form) and eat an anti-inflammatory diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant proteins to ease joint inflammation. And take a daily antioxidant regimen to help prevent oxidative damage that contributes to osteoarthritis. Other important lifestyle strategies for OA include maintaining a healthy weight and getting regular physical activity (water exercise classes are fabulous choices). For more advice, purchase our *Special Report on Osteoarthritis*.

Zyflamend. Containing various herbs with anti-inflammatory properties, including turmeric, ginger, and holy basil, Zyflamend naturally inhibits the enzyme (called COX-2) that triggers the joint inflammation causing arthritis pain. Most prescription drugs for arthritis target this same enzyme, but work faster and have greater toxicity. Zyflamend may take up to two months to give results.

How to take: Take Zyflamend as one softgel or two dropers of liquid extract twice a day. The capsules should be taken with a meal and a glass of water, but the liquid can be taken with or without food. To switch from NSAIDs to this herbal product, start Zyflamend at about half the recommended dose and continue taking your usual medication. After one month, cut the NSAIDs in half and increase the Zyflamend to the full recommended dose. A month later, take only the Zyflamend and see whether your symptoms are controlled. (To locate a retailer, visit new-chapter.com.)

Possible concerns: There are theoretical concerns that these herbs can interfere with certain medications like blood thinners, but I'm not aware of patients who've experienced drug-herb interactions when using Zyflamend.

Glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate. Although results from a long-awaited trial concluded that these two supplements, which are synthetic versions of natural constituents of healthy cartilage, were no better than a placebo in reducing knee pain in people with mild OA, this combination did provide significant pain relief for nearly 80 percent of the 354 patients with moderate to severe knee pain from OA (*New England Journal of Medicine*, February 23, 2006).

Two Ancient Remedies

Although these two ancient remedies have little scientific evidence behind them, many people with osteoarthritis have reported pain relief when using these plant-based treatments.

Devil's claw. Derived from an African plant with claw-like fruit, devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) is used to treat the aching and stiffness of OA, although how it works is unknown. Look for products standardized to contain 50 to 100 mg of harpagoside. The dosage based on research is 600 to 1,200 mg of devil's claw three times a day as a liquid extract. Side effects include stomach upset and ringing in the ears. Avoid if you have an ulcer, take blood thinners, or are taking medications to control blood sugar.

Reishi. This Asian mushroom has a long history as a healing herb. Although there are no scientific studies involving people with OA, compounds found in this woody tree fungus have been shown to reduce inflammation in mice without the gastrointestinal problems associated with NSAIDs. Take 2 to 6 grams a day of the raw mushroom, or an equivalent dose of concentrated extract, with meals.

And test-tube studies suggest that glucosamine may stimulate cartilage production and chondroitin may slow its loss.

How to take: My suggested daily dose is 1,500 mg of glucosamine with or without 1,200 mg of chondroitin, taken on an empty stomach in two or three divided doses. It may take at least two months to see results.

Possible concerns: Glucosamine may interact with certain diuretic drugs, while chondroitin may cause excessive bleeding if taken with blood thinners. Since glucosamine is made from crab, lobster, and shrimp shells, it could conceivably cause an allergic reaction in people sensitive to shellfish.

SAM-e. By delivering sulfur to cartilage, SAM-e (S-adenosylmethionine) may reduce pain and play a role in repairing cartilage and improving function. One study found SAM-e was as effective as Celebrex for knee osteoarthritis, although the supplement worked more slowly than the drug (*BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, February 26, 2004), and other studies have showed similar results when compared to NSAIDs.

How to take: Start with 400 mg twice a day for two weeks and then decrease the dose to 200 mg twice a day. If you can find them, use enteric-coated products of the butanedisulfonate form, which is more bioavailable. Since SAM-e's breakdown in the body may create homocysteine, a substance that may increase the risk of heart disease, also supplement with vitamin B-complex, which lowers homocysteine levels.

Possible concerns: SAM-e is expensive and may trigger manic episodes in people with bipolar disorder. **SP**

3 Medical Uses for Yoga

From digestive problems and heart disease to arthritis and asthma, there's growing interest in the use of yoga as a medical treatment. In the last two decades, Western scientists have begun studying yoga for a variety of health concerns, prompted by promising earlier research in India, where these published studies are not easily accessible and may lack the scientific rigor of randomized, controlled clinical trials. For now, Western studies are small and short term, but as yoga's popularity rises, it will likely attract more researchers' attention. If you have any injuries, musculoskeletal problems, or significant medical issues, I recommend you look for opportunities to learn and practice therapeutic yoga.

Here are three promising areas of contemporary research on the healing potential of yoga:

Yoga in Integrative Cancer Care. Yoga can help people with cancer as they receive active treatment or recover from it. Like many researchers studying the health benefits of yoga, Lorenzo Cohen, PhD, director of the integrative medicine program at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, has personal experience with it. He was exposed to this ancient mind-body practice through his grandmother, who started doing yoga in her 40s and eventually became an instructor. When Cohen, who is trained in medical psychology, started working with cancer patients, he was aware of the stress they were feeling and wanted to find ways to relieve it. "Yoga seemed like a complete program to do this," he says.

In his initial research involving 39 people with Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, he evaluated how Tibetan yoga—a gentle form of movement that also involves controlled breathing and stilling of the mind through visualization and meditation—helped people cope with the side effects of cancer treatment, especially fatigue. Half the lymphoma patients took seven weekly Tibetan yoga classes lasting 90 minutes while a control group did not. (Tibetan yoga postures are done seated or on the floor.) Those practicing yoga said they got to sleep sooner, slept longer, and needed fewer drugs to fall asleep (*Cancer*, April 15, 2004). Since sleep disturbances are a common complaint of people with cancer, discovering effective ways to enhance sleep quality can not only improve health but can lessen the stress of the disease.

In a second study, presented at an oncology meeting in June, Cohen collaborated with a yoga research foundation in India. Sixty-one women with breast cancer who were receiving radiation treatment participated in the study. Half the women took an hour-long hatha yoga class twice a week. One week after radiation treatment ended, the women who practiced yoga had significantly better physical functioning and general health and felt less sleepy during the day compared to a control group. As Cohen notes, "People with cancer are going through a traumatic life-threatening experience, and yoga is particularly useful because it incorporates both physical and psychological components that help patients to feel better, cope better, and know themselves better."

Next, Cohen will focus on women with breast cancer who are undergoing chemotherapy. He recently received a grant

from the National Cancer Institute to study the effects of a Tibetan yoga program compared to stretching exercises or standard care. He hopes to learn if there is something unique about doing yoga or whether cancer patients simply benefit from extra attention and support of a medical community.

Yoga Eases Insomnia. You might think of chronic insomnia as just a sleep problem, yet there's good evidence that it's more likely a disorder caused by cognitive and physiological arousal. In other words, the reason some people have trouble falling or staying asleep is because their sympathetic nervous system remains activated, leading to higher levels of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol as well as an increased heart rate, body temperature, and metabolism. Even their minds are in an aroused state, constantly thinking and having trouble shutting off.

"For people with chronic insomnia, it's as if their thermostats are stuck at a higher level all the time, and it's closer to alert levels," says Sat Bir S. Khalsa, PhD, a sleep researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. He recognized that treatments aimed at resetting this out-of-whack thermostat and decreasing arousal levels could help insomniacs get a good night's rest. So he turned to yoga, which he practices.

In his pilot study, Khalsa followed 20 adults with insomnia for 10 weeks. The first two weeks, participants kept their normal sleep schedules. After a yoga training session, they were then asked to practice a daily 45-minute Kundalini yoga routine on their own before bedtime for eight weeks. It consisted of seated postures that emphasized deep breathing; they also kept a sleep-wake diary. Overall, yoga proved to be a good sedative: It helped decrease total wake time by more than 26 percent and produced significant improvements in total sleep time and other measures of sleep quality (*Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, December 2004).

According to Khalsa, "Yoga is easy to learn and is particularly effective at relaxation. It addresses the mental and emotional arousal at the root of many insomniacs' problems." Encouraged by these preliminary findings, he is currently evaluating data from more than 30 people with chronic insomnia (not due to an underlying medical problem like depression, anxiety, or fibromyalgia) who were assigned to either a group that practiced yoga and relaxation exercises or one that learned sleep hygiene (behavioral) techniques. He recommends that people with chronic insomnia not do yoga only, but combine it with other effective approaches for this condition. For example, cognitive-behavioral therapy is now offered at many sleep clinics.

Yoga Reduces Back Pain. Scientists are beginning to gather data that yoga can benefit a bad back. But this wasn't the case when Bradly Jacobs, MD, MPH, of the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine first looked at the medical literature and found nothing. By the time Dr. Jacobs, who has used yoga to ease his own recurring back pain, wrote a grant, got funding, and released his results, there were at least four studies showing yoga is good for back pain.

In his research of 52 people with chronic back pain, half were assigned to a twice-weekly, 90-minute Iyengar yoga class for three months or to a group that received an educational brochure on back pain. (Iyengar yoga uses props, like chairs,

belts, cushions, and blocks, and might be good for people who need additional support.) Yoga was found to improve sleep and emotional well-being, and decreased evening cortisol levels, indicating reduced stress. Although pain levels did not change, participants reported better function. "People with back pain are often afraid of doing certain activities, so perhaps if yoga teaches them to relax and expand their boundaries, this willingness might extend into other areas of their life," says Dr. Jacobs. "Yoga is a sophisticated approach to manage back problems because it's an active physical therapy and you learn how to relax your muscles using breath and meditation," he adds. I think yoga can also help change your mental relationship with pain and have a direct effect on the back.

In another small study of 42 people with low back pain, participants who completed a four-month program of Iyengar

yoga had significant reductions in pain intensity, reliance on pain medication, and disability compared to those who did not take yoga (*Pain*, May 2005). And in the largest study to date, involving some 100 adults with chronic back pain, researchers in Seattle found that people who took three months' worth of weekly classes in viniyoga, a gentle therapeutic form, had less pain, improved function, and needed fewer pain medications approximately three months later compared to those who took a weekly aerobic exercise and strengthening class or those given a self-care book on back pain (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 20, 2005). **SP**

To learn more, see *Yoga Rx* by Larry Payne, PhD, and Richard Usatine, MD (Broadway, 2002), and *Dr. Yoga* by Nirmala Heriza (Tarcher, 2004). To find a yoga therapist, visit iayt.org.

Natural Approaches for Lyme Disease

Summer is prime time for Lyme disease (LD). The deer ticks that transmit this infection are most active during warmer months, when more people are walking or hiking in the wooded or grassy areas where ticks thrive. First identified some 30 years ago in Lyme, Connecticut, the disease has spread to nearly every state but is concentrated in the Northeast, upper Midwest, and northern California. Oddly enough, the 19 "blue" states won by Senator John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election account for 95 percent of LD cases reported two years earlier. Here are my recommendations for treating both acute and chronic forms of the illness.

Acute LD. To catch LD, you must be bitten by a tick that's infected with the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The disease typically begins with a rash that resembles a bull's-eye, although up to 30 percent of LD patients never get one. Flu-like symptoms are also common, such as fever, chills, fatigue, headache, and body aches. Blood tests can help confirm a diagnosis of LD, although they're not foolproof. Conventional physicians often prescribe a 10- to 21-day course of oral antibiotics to treat early-stage LD, and so do I.

Chronic LD. The infection can become chronic if it goes undetected (for instance, if there's no rash) or if the patient doesn't respond to anti-

biotic treatment. Symptoms that may develop include chronic joint inflammation, especially in the knees; neurological problems like facial palsy and peripheral neuropathy (numbness, burning, or tingling sensations in the hands and feet); cognitive difficulties like trouble concentrating and impaired memory; and cardiac arrhythmias. People with chronic LD may be misdiagnosed as having multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, or ALS, among other conditions.

Conventional physicians may prescribe an intravenous antibiotic for two to four weeks or a prolonged course of oral antibiotics, but these regimens have significant side effects. I have found modern Chinese medicine—which matches traditional Chinese treatments to Western medical conditions—to be a better option. I've referred many patients to Qingcai Zhang, a Chinese-trained MD in New York City who specializes in chronic infectious diseases. Dr. Zhang relies on anti-microbial herbs that act against *B. burgdorferi* and other tick-borne bacteria; he says LD symptoms are often due to infection by multiple organisms, which aren't necessarily addressed by antibiotic drugs. He also uses herbs to strengthen immunity, reduce inflammation, ease joint pain, improve fatigue, and enhance brain function, depending on the patient's symptoms. Plus, he's found regular

acupuncture sessions helpful to manage pain and regulate immunity.

Dr. Zhang has gotten impressive results: After six months or more of daily herbal treatment, at least 60 percent of his patients with chronic LD were symptom-free and more than 80 percent improved, he says. If you are interested in visiting the Zhang Clinic or getting a phone consult, write to the clinic at 420 Lexington Ave., Suite 631, New York NY 10170. The herbs are available at hepapro.com, but to learn which ones are best for you, I advise working with Dr. Zhang or reading his new book, *Lyme Disease and Modern Chinese Medicine* (Sino-Med Research Institute, 2006).

Prevention. Take these precautions to reduce your risk of Lyme disease: In wooded or grassy areas, wear a long-sleeved shirt, tuck pants into socks, use tick repellent on exposed skin and clothing, and check yourself for the tiny ticks (which may look like a speck of dirt or a new freckle). If you do find one, don't panic: An infected tick must be attached for at least 24 hours to transmit Lyme. To remove a tick, gently grasp it as close to the skin as possible with tweezers and then slowly pull it straight out. Do not remove a tick by burning it or applying Vaseline or nail polish: These methods may increase your chance of infection by causing the tick to excrete bacteria. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Bagged Salads; Colloidal Minerals; and More

Is there any help for leg venous insufficiency other than wearing support hose?

I often recommend horse chestnut seed extract (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) in both capsule and topical form for venous insufficiency, a condition in which veins in the legs are damaged and do not return blood to the heart normally. Studies have shown that taking this herbal extract can help relieve symptoms, such as pain, swelling, and heaviness in the legs. Horse chestnut seed's active compounds are thought to inhibit enzymes that can damage capillary walls, and this helps strengthen veins. One trial suggested that oral horse chestnut extract was as effective in treating venous insufficiency as compression stockings, a conventional treatment I also recommend that uses the elasticity in stockings to create pressure at the ankle and drive blood flow upwards. One reliable horse chestnut supplement is Venastat. Take one capsule every 12 hours with water before meals. Oral horse chestnut might interfere with blood-thinning medications such as Coumadin, increasing the risk of bleeding. And avoid taking the herb if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Although they are not as well researched, topical creams containing horse chestnut are also available online and at some health food stores; follow package directions.

I also suggest that you exercise regularly to increase circulation, avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time, and elevate your legs above your heart for at least 10 minutes a day to promote blood flow.

I heard a report about bagged salads containing *E. coli* bacteria. Is this true?

It is. Last fall, an outbreak that sickened at least 26 people in three states was linked to pre-packaged salads made by Dole, which voluntarily recalled the products. The Food and Drug Administration has been pressuring the leafy-greens industry to do more to protect consumers from food-borne illnesses: Since 1995, at least 19 *E. coli* outbreaks have been linked to eating fresh lettuce and spinach. Possible routes of transmission include contaminated irrigation water, the use of inadequately processed manure as fertilizer, and even cross-contamination from raw meats in the kitchen. (Infection with *E. coli*, which can cause severe, bloody diarrhea and intense abdominal cramps, is most often caused by eating raw or undercooked meat.)

Such outbreaks, while troubling, are rare, and I don't want to discourage you from eating leafy greens, which are among nature's healthiest foods. So take these precautions to reduce your risk: Even though bagged salad is prewashed, it doesn't hurt to rinse it again under running water. Always wash fresh greens that aren't pre-packaged. Don't use bagged

salad after the expiration date: *E. coli* can grow rapidly in deteriorating greens. Keep salad refrigerated, and store it away from any raw meat.

What can I do about dark circles under my eyes? Is there something that I'm lacking?

The dark circles under your eyes are not usually a reflection of the lack of a specific nutrient or poor health and are most likely a result of genetics and aging. The skin under the eye is extremely thin and delicate, and the veins below this transparent surface can become more prominent and appear bluer as skin thins with age or darkens with sun exposure. Undereye circles tend to run in families and may seem temporarily more noticeable on account of allergies, hay fever, eczema, nasal congestion, fatigue, pregnancy, or menstruation. I've been working with Origins to develop a botanical approach for dark circles, but for now, your best bet may be to camouflage them with makeup, such as concealer or foundation; when outdoors, apply sunscreen to protect this delicate skin and wear sunglasses.

Are silver and gold colloids safe to use? And do you ever recommend them?

You can buy colloidal mineral products—from silver and gold to copper and zinc—but I don't believe the health claims made for them and wouldn't spend my money on them or use them. Colloids are suspensions of particles, in this case minerals, in a liquid, and these products are sold as dietary supplements in capsule or liquid forms, usually through multilevel marketing. Manufacturers claim colloidal silver is a natural alternative to antibiotics, supposedly effective for boosting immunity, killing viruses, and treating a wide range of health conditions. There's no good scientific evidence that colloidal silver (or colloidal gold, another supposed cure-all) does any of these things. I wouldn't take any silver products internally since silver can build up in the tissues over time, causing a permanent bluish-grey skin discoloration that's known as argyria.

I've seen disturbing news about patients on Fosamax or Actonel showing signs of dead jaw syndrome. Is there a better and safer medication for osteoporosis?

A growing number of cases of necrosis (death) of the jawbone have been reported in cancer patients taking IV bisphosphonates, and the problem has also been linked to the oral bisphosphonates alendronate (Fosamax) and risedronate (Actonel) taken to prevent osteoporosis. Although I'm concerned about this side effect, in which part of the

NEW!

The Self Healing Special Report on Low Back Pain is now available (see enclosed brochure).

jawbone dies and becomes exposed in the mouth, I continue to recommend these bone-protective medications to people with osteoporosis or advanced osteopenia, because I think they do a good job of slowing bone loss. And compared to the other side effects of these two drugs, which include gastrointestinal problems such as difficulty swallowing, inflammation of the esophagus, and gastric ulcer, reports are rare. Other drugs available to fight osteoporosis and osteopenia, such as raloxifene (Evista) and calcitonin (Miacalcin), have their own side effects. I suggest talking to your doctor to find out which one may be best for you.

Symptoms of necrosis of the jawbone include exposed bone in the mouth, numbness or heaviness in the jaw, pain,

swelling, infection, and loosening of teeth. The risk of developing it appears to increase the longer the medication is used, although the exact cause is unknown. Factors such as overall health and other medications taken may also play a role. Patients taking bisphosphonates should practice good oral hygiene, get routine dental cleanings, and manage dental infections early to avoid surgery, when possible.

Watch for more news on this subject. We may have a different view of the safety of bisphosphonate drugs as more people take them over time. 

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

No Help from Cholesterol Supplement? Policosanol, a supplement thought to cut cholesterol levels, failed to help in a recent study. Researchers in Germany randomly assigned 143 adults with high cholesterol to take one of four doses of policosanol, extracted from sugar cane, or a placebo each day. After three months, none of the groups had more than a 10 percent drop in LDL levels, and there were no significant differences among the groups in other lipid levels. The findings contradict those of earlier studies in Cuba that suggested policosanol lowers total and LDL cholesterol and raises HDL cholesterol. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, May 17, 2006)

Comment: These results confirm my long-standing doubts about the efficacy of policosanol to lower cholesterol. I think red rice yeast supplements are a better bet.

Physical Signs May Tip Off Dementia. The earliest clues of Alzheimer's disease and dementia may be physical rather than mental changes, suggest Seattle researchers. After following nearly 2,300 people over age 65, none of whom had cognitive problems when the study began, 319 participants had developed dementia six years later, including some 220 cases of Alzheimer's disease. By evaluating physical and mental functioning, scientists discovered that people with the highest performance scores on physical tests of balance, hand grip, and walking were three times less likely to develop dementia than those with lower scores. Difficulties with walking and balance appeared to be the first indicators of dementia risk, while a weak handgrip occurred at a later stage of cognitive decline. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, May 22, 2006)

Comment: Scientists were surprised to find that in dementia physical changes may precede subtle declines in thinking and what's viewed as a brain disease may be closely tied to physical fitness.

Extra Pounds Raise Breast-Cancer Risk. Women who gain more weight in adulthood increase their risk for all types, stages, and grades of breast cancer, concludes a recent study. Using data from more than 44,000 postmenopausal women who weren't taking hormone therapy, researchers found that women who gained more than 60 pounds during adulthood were almost twice as likely to have ductal tumors and more than 1.5 times more likely to have lobular type cancers than women who gained 20 pounds or less. The risk for cancer spreading beyond the breast increased for all women who gained weight, but tripled for those who put on more than 60 pounds. (*Cancer*, July 1, 2006)

Comment: I'm not surprised by the large increase in risk associated with gaining 60 pounds. Breast cancer has been linked to higher levels of the hormone estrogen, and fat tissue produces estrogen. This study offers one more reason to manage your weight by exercising regularly and eating sensibly.

Music Relieves Pain. It may come as music to the ears of those with chronic pain to learn that listening to an hour of music a day for one week takes the edge off discomfort, depression, and disability. Researchers divided 60 middle-aged adults with chronic pain into three groups: One listened to their favorite tunes or nature sounds, another was given relaxing instrumental music, and a third received no music therapy. After seven days, both groups listening to music every day reported that their pain and disability levels fell by around 20 percent, with a similar reduction in depression compared to the control group. (*Journal of Advanced Nursing*, June 2006)

Comment: While the style of music selected made little difference and scientists couldn't explain why music helped ease chronic pain, relaxation might have been involved. Music therapy can be a simple, enjoyable addition to any pain management program. To find a music therapist near you, email findMT@musictherapy.org. 

Exploring Substitutes for Meat

Move over, meat: There are now a wide variety of tasty plant-based protein sources to take your place at mealtimes. I've long enjoyed soy products and the wheat protein gluten as substitutes for meat in my diet and I often recommend people do the same, even if they're not vegetarians. For instance, some Chinese restaurants feature surprisingly realistic "mock meat" dishes fashioned from gluten. You can also buy canned, flavored gluten in Chinese grocery stores and add it to stir-fried vegetables for a quick, delicious main dish. To help you sort through some of the other protein-rich plant foods, I've enlisted Greg Hottinger, a nutritionist at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine and author of *The Best Natural Foods on the Market Today* (Huckleberry Mountain Press, 2004).

Tofu ► This soybean product has little taste, but it absorbs flavors well, so it's great in marinades and spicy recipes. One serving of tofu has a comparable amount of protein to a serving of meat, but with fewer calories and no saturated fat. Unlike animal protein, tofu contains isoflavones, plant estrogens that may protect against certain types of cancer and improve cardiovascular health, when eaten in moderation. In place of lunchmeats, I use slices of pressed organic tofu; the Tofurky brand offers a wide assortment of flavors from Philly style steak to hickory smoked.

• **What's new:** There are now microwaveable tofu dinners and breakfast sandwiches featuring soy rather than sausage, but these foods are more processed and may not contain the isoflavones and fiber found in whole soy foods. Many manufacturers of tofu and tempeh are also adding some fat and dairy, such as egg whites and milk protein, to their products to improve the taste and hold up on the grill. "This is actually a good move because they've created a product that tastes good," says Hottinger, "but you now need to remember that just because it's a vegetarian food does not mean it's vegan or low-fat, and they often contain high amounts of sodium." I suggest you eat processed tofu products in moderation. Avoid products whose main ingredients are soy isolates or isolated soy protein. They're not whole soy foods, and their long-term safety remains unknown.

• **How to cook:** For stir-fries, sautés, kabobs, and the grill, choose firm or extra-firm water-packed tofu found in the refrigerator section of your supermarket. Before cooking, drain the liquid and press the tofu between paper towels or dishcloths to force out excess moisture; this allows seasonings to be better absorbed. Marinate in the refrigerator for no more than an hour before cooking to maintain texture

or purchase tofu already seasoned. Tofurky makes tofu sausages (my favorite is tomato and basil) and kielbasa that taste great grilled or in pasta sauce.

Tempeh ► Unlike the bland flavor of tofu, this fermented soybean product has a nutty taste and meaty texture that I often enjoy in place of bacon and ground meat. Made by culturing cooked soybeans with a mold at high temperatures, tempeh is low in calories and fat and has no cholesterol. It has as much protein as beef and is a good source of fiber, vitamin E, and iron, says Hottinger, adding that it also has 60 mg of isoflavones per 4-ounce serving compared to 38 mg in tofu. Because tempeh is fermented, it's easier to digest than other soy products (i.e., no gas).

• **What's new:** In addition to fat and dairy to boost taste, tempeh products may also include other ingredients, such as vegetables, grains, and seeds. I enjoy the added texture, flavor variations, and fiber in some of these products.

• **How to cook:** Tempeh comes as burgers, burger crumbles, or smoked strips (Lightlife's Fakin' Bacon is a good brand), which I pan fry in olive oil, include in sandwiches with lettuce and tomato, or crumble on salad. Hottinger recommends marinating tempeh overnight or for at least six hours. Don't be alarmed if there are black or gray spots on tempeh; this is a natural part of the fermentation process.

Quorn ► The makers of Quorn compare this product to mushrooms, but it's made from a mold (*Fusarium venenatum*) that grows on grains. This fermented product has a hearty texture, and it's made into foods from chicken-style cutlets to meatballs to a turkey-style roast. Although I would prefer it didn't have animal protein from added egg whites, it's high in protein and cholesterol-free.

• **What's new:** Quorn first came to the US market in 2002, but it has been a leading meat substitute in Europe for nearly 20 years. However, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer-watchdog group, is running a campaign against Quorn and the Food and Drug Administration, saying it wasn't adequately tested for allergenicity, which they claim can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea in some people after eating. Yet, I recommend trying Quorn. I enjoy their cutlets, and so do many of my friends. No one I know has experienced any problems from them.

• **How to cook:** Many Quorn products come in a variety of ready-to-eat sautés, faux meatballs, and chicken-style nuggets. But you can substitute Quorn—much like tempeh—in many meat-based recipes, and I find that their cutlets hold up well on the barbecue. **SP**

next issue

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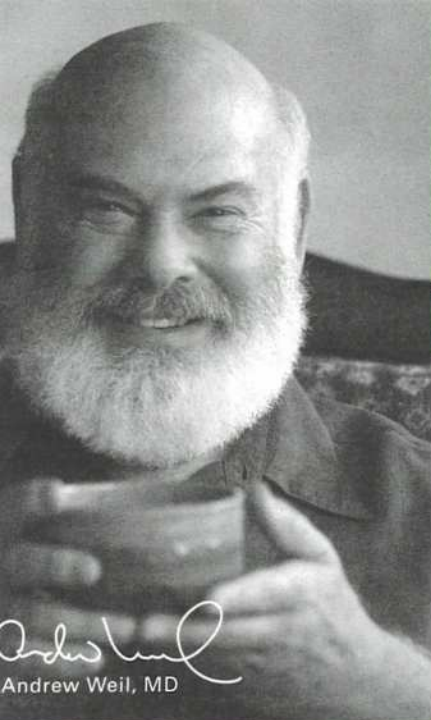
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ON MY MIND

Lemonade

Sipping a tall glass of ice-cold lemonade may provide health benefits beyond quenching your thirst. A study presented at a recent scientific meeting suggests this refreshing beverage can help prevent kidney stones. People prone to these painful stones often have low levels of stone-preventing citrate in their urine. Doctors usually prescribe the drug potassium citrate to these individuals, but drinking a few daily glasses of lemonade—which contains natural citrate—appeared to be a viable alternative.

My favorite recipe. When the temperature rises, I make honey ginger lemonade from my cookbook *The Healthy Kitchen* (Knopf, 2002). The ginger in this recipe adds some “zing” to this summertime staple. Bring to a boil 6 to 8 cups of water with 1/4 cup of peeled ginger slices. Reduce to a simmer and add 1/2 cup honey and one chopped sprig of mint. Stir until the honey dissolves. Strain into a pitcher, add one cup of fresh lemon juice, and chill. Dilute to taste. Serve over ice in six 10-ounce glasses, garnishing each with a mint sprig. 

Can Exercise Help Prevent Cancer?

Regular exercise does a body good, from strengthening your heart and keeping you trim to lowering blood pressure and improving mood. But for more incentive to go on a bike ride or take a brisk walk, consider this: A growing number of studies have shown that physical activity can reduce the risk of breast and colon cancers and likely a number of other malignancies. By one estimate, being both inactive and overweight accounts for one-quarter to one-third of all breast, colon, endometrial, kidney, and esophageal cancers worldwide. I'll give you a rundown of the scientific evidence for the cancer-protective effects of exercise.

Breast cancer. Results from the Nurses' Health Study, an ongoing, long-term survey of more than 120,000 nurses, revealed that women who exercise vigorously—such as walking briskly—for seven hours a week can reduce their risk of breast cancer by 20 percent. What's more, regular physical activity also seems to improve the life expectancy of women who develop breast cancer. Several factors may explain these benefits, including exercise's ability to boost the immune system as well as lower circulating estrogen levels. Excess estrogen has been linked to breast cancer as well as a number of other hormonally driven cancers such as those of the uterus and ovaries. Being more active also appears to increase melatonin levels, a hormone that can increase immunity and impair cancer growth. In fact, a study found the longer a woman worked out, the higher her melatonin levels rose the next night.

Colon cancer. Taking a brisk walk for at least 30 minutes more than twice a week may lower your chance of developing colon cancer by 30 to 40 percent. In addition to increasing the body's ability to fight off disease, exercise speeds up digestion, shortening the time that potentially harmful substances spend in your gut and colon. A recent study also revealed that being active releases special proteins that inhibit the growth or spread of colon cancer

cells. In addition, a regular and intense workout—such as an hour-long walk six times a week—has also been shown to improve your odds of surviving the disease, most likely due to immune stimulation and a decrease in body weight and fat.

Other cancers. Although the science is not yet conclusive on exercise's ability to prevent other cancers, it seems promising. For example, one recent study showed even routine activities such as doing housework for four or more hours a day may reduce a woman's risk of endometrial cancer by as much as 30 to 40 percent. Likewise, a Canadian study showed women with the highest levels of moderate activity, such as walking, reduced their risk of ovarian cancer by 33 percent. Of course, men can benefit too. According to a study of men with prostate cancer, those over 65 who exercised at least three hours a week were significantly less likely to die from the disease.

My exercise advice. The amount of physical activity needed to ward off cancer is debatable, but I agree with the American Cancer Society's recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate activity (causing a slight increase in heart rate and breathing) five or more days a week. To lose weight and body fat, you may need to get 60 to 90 minutes of activity on most days. Individuals with cancer should work with their health-care team to create a fitness program. 

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My friend and colleague Paul Stamets calls mushrooms “miniature pharmaceutical factories.” He’s right. These fungi aren’t just tasty, they also have medicinal powers. As owner and director of the research laboratories at Fungi Perfecti, Stamets is currently supplying US Project BioShield with the agarikon (*Fomitopsis officinalis*) mushroom to develop a potential preventive agent for smallpox. It’s the first time this program, which was created to improve medical countermeasures against terrorism, has used a natural product in its research efforts.

Although Asians have used mushrooms as medicine for centuries, drug research in the West was abandoned in the 1960s for more easily produced mold fungi, such as penicillin. “Now pharmacologists have come full circle and they are actively looking into mushrooms,” says Stamets. Lentinan, a leading medication in Japan for treating cancer, is made from complex sugars called polysaccharides found in shiitake mushrooms. US scientists are paying more attention. The National Institutes of Health recently allocated \$1.8 million to conduct rigorous studies of the turkey tail (*Trametes versicolor*) mushroom and its effects on breast cancer treatment.

Since it’s hard for the body to break down the medicinal compounds in edible mushrooms, I recommend taking certified organic extracts to help boost the immune system. Choose whole extracts of mushrooms rather than products containing one isolated compound. When I travel or do public speaking, I take a dropperful of Fungi Perfecti’s MycoSoft Gold liquid, which includes extracts from 13 species of mushrooms, in a little water twice a day to help make me more resistant to germs and infections.

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Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil’s

self healing

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Feel Calmer in Only Five Minutes

How much time would you need to start your day off on the right foot or to unwind in the evening? Can you spare five minutes? I’m glad that Jeffrey Brantley, MD, founder and director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine, and Wendy Millstine have co-written a pair of books each filled with 100 simple, five-minute activities to help you stay calm and focused throughout the day or enjoy a peaceful night. Here are three easy relaxation practices from *Five Good Minutes* (2005) and *Five Good Minutes in the Evening* (2006), published by New Harbinger.

Jet Fuel in the Morning. Breakfast is your jet fuel to get your day started. This morning, take a few moments to respect what you put into your body. Choose something healthy and delicious, like fruit and yogurt or almond butter on toast. Remove any distractions by turning off the news and putting away the newspaper. Take a good, long look at your food, and take in all the smells. Notice your hunger and the sensations in your body. As you eat, imagine that each bite is filling you with wholesome energy for the busy day ahead.

Five-fingered Peace. Use this exercise to relax and promote inner strength. Touching your thumb to your index finger, travel back to a time when you felt a healthy exhaustion after exerting yourself physically. Touching your thumb to your middle finger, remember a loving exchange you had with someone. Touching your thumb to your ring finger, recollect the most caring gesture you have ever received. Touching your thumb to your pinkie, picture the most magnificent place that you have seen or dreamed about. After doing this brief exercise, you should feel more centered and at ease.

Staircase to Sleepy-town. To drift off to sleep more easily, close your eyes in bed and focus your attention on your breathing. Ease your mind and worries by saying, “I am feeling my body growing heavier and heavier, loosening and relaxing with each breath.” Now visualize a staircase descending to a place that calms you. With each step, you will become more comfortable and serene. Finally, imagine yourself floating above the staircase, weightless and free. 

Adapted with permission from New Harbinger Publications, Inc. (newharbinger.com).

Filtering Out Coffee's Perks and Pitfalls

Science has a mixed view of coffee these days, with evidence pointing to both positive and adverse health effects. I've never liked coffee and I'm not caffeine-sensitive, so I don't get a buzz from it. Personal taste aside, I often give patients a number of reasons to avoid coffee: It can cause tremor, insomnia, anxiety, and irregular heart-beat, plus irritate the GI system, bladder, and prostate, but these negative reactions vary among individuals. Nonetheless, I realize that many people love their morning coffee and rely on the stimulant to get them through the day. So how good or bad is it? Here are some of the latest findings.

Heart health. Coffee's effects on the cardiovascular system have received much scientific attention. The evidence is conflicting, although a reassuring 20-year study that recently tracked the coffee-drinking habits of some 44,000 men and 84,000 women reported that the beverage yielded no harm, whether people drank less than one cup a month or more than six cups daily (*Circulation*, May 2, 2006). Meir Stampfer, MD, a professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health who has studied coffee's health impact, says, "The evidence seems pretty clear to me that in the typical ranges of consumption, coffee does no harm, and may even have a modest benefit on cardiovascular health."

A review of nine studies suggested that higher coffee consumption may significantly reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, a risk factor for heart disease (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 6, 2005). Other recent findings suggest that drinking decaf lowers diabetes risk due to a compound other than caffeine (*Diabetes Care*, February 2006). It's too early to say that coffee prevents blood sugar problems, since some previous studies found its consumption decreased insulin sensitivity, making people more prone to diabetes.

Decaffeinated coffee may not be any better for you, since compounds other than caffeine may play a role in keeping your heart healthy. Many studies have shown that both regular and decaffeinated coffee can raise blood pressure, at least temporarily after drinking it, although it's unclear whether this ups your chances of developing hypertension. Research suggests drinking three to six cups of decaf every day raises unhealthy blood fats that influence LDL cholesterol, but regular coffee doesn't. Still, the American Heart Association believes drinking one to two cups of coffee a day is not harmful for heart health, but it doesn't recommend more, since the effects of high caffeine intake on heart disease are unclear.

Brain health. When it comes to caffeine in healthy individuals, the evidence is only positive for the brain, according to Robert Greene, MD, a neuroscientist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. "In addition to increasing alertness, most studies suggest that coffee (caffeinated) can be neuroprotective," he says. It's mainly thanks to caffeine's ability to block the body's release of a sleep-inducing chemical called adenosine, causing increased alertness and energy. Through some related effect on adenosine, studies also suggest caffeine may prevent some degeneration of dopamine receptors in the brain associated with Parkinson's

Alternatives to Coffee

There are many other ways to enjoy a cup of warm, aromatic, coffee-like beverage, including a variety of roasted grains, nuts, roots, and spices, which you can find at your supermarket or health food store. Some naturally caffeine-free alternatives include **Roastaroma** and **Teeccino**, both made with roasted barley, chicory root, and carob. Roastaroma is available in tea bags and also contains spices such as cinnamon and star anise. Teeccino is in a ground form that you brew like coffee, and tastes of fruits and nuts such as figs and almonds. **Pero** and **Cafix** are instant drinks (sold as powders or crystals) made from barley, chicory, and rye. **Postum** is an instant powdered coffee substitute made from wheat and naturally sweetened with molasses. If you're interested in switching to tea, **genmaicha** is a Japanese green tea with roasted brown rice and a nutty flavor, and **pu-erh** is a dark tea with an earthy taste from Yunnan, China. Both contain some caffeine, but much less of it than coffee.

disease and improve cognition in Alzheimer's patients. Decaf doesn't seem to offer the same benefits, although other coffee compounds haven't been a focus for brain studies.

Cancer. Coffee may help ward off various types of cancer, such as liver and colon, although it's not definitive whether it's protective or if caffeine is responsible. Previously, some studies had suggested coffee might be cancer causing. While most research has looked at regular coffee's effect on cancer risk, a large study lasting two decades showed that people who regularly consumed two or more cups of decaffeinated coffee a day had a 52 percent lower incidence of rectal cancer than those who never drank decaf (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, February 16, 2005). Some other recent findings suggest coffee is a rich source of disease-fighting antioxidants, but I don't believe there's enough of them in the beverage to recommend you drink it to shore up a poor diet.

My bottom line. It's hard to suggest how many cups of coffee a day represent a safe upper limit, since it affects everyone differently. I don't think that decaf is a healthy compromise either, since many other active substances in coffee can still adversely affect the nervous, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and urinary systems on their own. And if you purchase organic varieties, you'll likely be doing more good for planetary health than your own well-being. Coffee fruit is covered in a husk, so the beans are actually well protected from pesticides. What you should consider is that the stronger your coffee, the higher the concentration of caffeine and other compounds you're getting in a cup. An 8-oz cup of brewed coffee typically has 85 mg of caffeine, instant has 75 mg, decaf has 3 mg, and a 1-oz cup of espresso has 40 mg. **SP**

New: My Latest Calcium Recommendations

Due to growing evidence that high doses of calcium do not prevent bone fractures and may even encourage the growth of prostate cancer cells, I recently reduced my supplemental calcium recommendation. I now advise that women take no more than 700 mg of supplemental calcium a day to get a total of 1,000 to 1,200 mg of calcium from food and supplements, and I now recommend that men do not take any supplemental calcium (see box below).

I've based my new recommendations mainly on research conducted by Walter Willett, MD, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, and Diane Feskanich, ScD, an epidemiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. These scientists and their colleagues looked extensively at clinical trials and analyzed data from two large observational studies: the Nurses' Health Study (NHS) of more than 70,000 women, and the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (HPFS) of 55,000 men.

They concluded that calcium promoted bone health in the clinical trials, which lasted only two to three years, but not in the long-term observational studies. "This may be because the small part of the bone, called the remodeling space, sponges up calcium in the initial year following a boost in intake, but then fills up and additional calcium no longer adds much benefit," says Dr. Willett. In several clinical trials, most of the reduction in bone loss with calcium supplementation took place only during the first year or two; after this, no lasting benefits were seen in bone mineral density.

This short-term effect may help explain the observational studies. When researchers looked at the relationship between postmenopausal women's hip fracture risk, calcium and vitamin D intake, and milk consumption in the NHS, they observed a significantly lower risk of hip fracture among women with higher vitamin D intakes, but calcium and milk intake didn't appear to be associated with hip fracture risk (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2003).

In fact, vitamin D may be a more important nutrient for your bones. "Although numerous clinical trials have shown reduced bone loss and fracture risk with calcium, many also included vitamin D supplements, so the source of the benefit is unclear," says Feskanich. Researchers analyzed hormone levels that regulate calcium metabolism in 944 healthy adults, and concluded that getting more than 800 mg of calcium a day might be unnecessary for bone health as long as blood levels of vitamin D are normal (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 9, 2005).

Despite disappointing findings on high calcium intake and bone health, sufficient calcium is essential. Calcium intake from diet and supplements replaces natural loss of the mineral and prevents extraction from bone. And studies of daily intake between 800 and 1,200 mg indicate that calcium may protect against colon cancer, can lower blood pressure, ease PMS symptoms, prevent insulin resistance, and act as a neuromuscular relaxant.

I think it's possible to get the lower amount of calcium I now recommend from your diet. The average person will get about 300 mg of calcium a day without any dairy products and will get an additional 300 to 400 mg with one glass of milk or equivalent calcium product, says Dr. Willett. So if a woman's daily diet includes a couple servings of calcium-rich foods or beverages, there is probably no reason for her to take a supplement. If not, she should supplement with 500 to 700 mg daily. Men typically get enough dietary calcium, unless they have eliminated calcium-rich foods. Men also need to make sure they do not get too much calcium (see below), since the mineral is added to many fortified foods such as cereals and power bars.

The Calcium and Prostate Cancer Connection? There have been several studies suggesting a link between calcium intake, especially dairy, and prostate cancer. A study of nearly 21,000 men found that those who consumed more than 600 mg of calcium daily from dairy products had a 32 percent higher risk of prostate cancer than those who consumed no more than 150 mg of calcium a day over 11 years (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, October 2001). And data from the HPFS suggest a link between higher supplemental calcium and advanced prostate cancer (*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, February 2006). One possible explanation is that too much calcium reduces the body's level of vitamin D in its active form, which has been shown to inhibit prostate cancer cells from growing in size and number, says Dr. Willett.

Common Questions on Calcium Supplements

1 What form of calcium is best as a supplement?

Calcium citrate seems to be better absorbed, especially in older people. Calcium carbonate is less expensive, but not as well absorbed. You should avoid coral calcium, a heavily marketed product with no proven health claims, as well as natural calcium supplements made

Calcium Advice: New vs. Old

Here is my latest thinking on daily *supplemental* calcium intake for people 19 and over. (For children and adolescents, check with your pediatrician.)

	NEW ADVICE	OLD ADVICE
WOMEN	No more than 700 mg daily (1,000 to 1,200 mg total from food and supplements)	Up to 1,500 mg daily (1,200 to 1,500 mg from food and supplements)
MEN	None (500 to 600 mg from food)	No more than 1,000 to 1,200 mg daily from food and supplements, preferably from food

from oyster shells or bone meal, which are likely to be contaminated with heavy metals.

2 *Is there an alternative to swallowing large calcium pills?*

You can crush them or try a chewable, liquid, or powder form.

3 *I've been taking your recommended higher dose of calcium for years. Have I done any harm?* You haven't, but do increase vitamin D to 1,000 IU a day and lower your daily calcium intake. The link between calcium and prostate cancer is not conclusive, but it's enough of a reason for men to be cautious.

4 *How much supplemental calcium should people with osteoporosis, osteopenia, or those at risk for these conditions take?* My new recommendations still hold true: no more than 700 mg of supplemental calcium for women and no supplemental calcium for men. "Inadequate calcium intake is probably not the primary cause for thinning bones and will usually make little difference on its own," says Dr. Willett.

Rethinking Dairy for Calcium. The milk-mustache ads are a clever marketing campaign by the dairy industry, but the

scientific evidence to back up milk's bone-building claims is surprisingly thin. I think Dr. Willett has a wonderful saying: "If you want to prevent bone fractures, forget the milk and take your cow for a walk." You're far better off doing weight-bearing exercises and getting enough vitamin D and K along with calcium from other foods or supplements.

Women from the Nurses' Health Study who drank milk twice a day were as likely to suffer a bone break as those who drank it once a week. And researchers found that Asians, who consume far less dietary calcium than Americans, have one-fifth the fracture rate of Westerners.

I suggest you limit dairy and instead explore some of my favorite calcium-rich foods such as broccoli, collards, tofu with added calcium, and canned salmon and sardines labeled "with bones." These sources lack the saturated fat in dairy and the retinol (preformed vitamin A) that's added to some milks and has been linked to hip fractures. I'm also worried that growth hormones given to some cows may contribute to the rise in hormonally driven cancers. 

How Healthy Is Your Cookware?

You may not give much thought to the pots and pans you use to prepare meals except to notice how well they cook your food and how easy they are to clean. Those practicalities are important, but you should also consider the safety of the cooking surface. Here are my thoughts on the health effects of some common types of cookware.

Aluminum. An excellent conductor of heat and easy to care for, aluminum cookware has a drawback: Acidic foods like tomato-based products or wine react with the metal, causing it to leach into your food. Anodized aluminum pans have a thicker, harder surface and are less likely to leach, but my preference is not to have aluminum touching food at all since the health risks of ingesting it—including a much-disputed possible connection between aluminum and Alzheimer's disease—are unknown.

Cast-iron. Your body can absorb dietary iron from many acidic foods cooked in cast-iron pots and pans. Too much iron can cause health problems, so people who don't need extra amounts of the mineral might want to choose different cookware. Some

cast-iron cookware is covered with porcelain enamel, making it easier to care for and preventing leaching.

Copper. Although it conducts heat very well, copper is difficult to maintain, requiring constant attention. The metal leaches into food, and while our bodies need small amounts, most people get plenty from food. Consuming excess copper can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Glass. It's probably the safest and least reactive cookware, but because glass does not conduct heat well you are better off using it in the oven than on the stovetop.

Stainless steel. This metal does not conduct heat well, so many stainless steel pots and pans are now made with a layer of copper or aluminum underneath the stainless steel cooking surface to increase conductivity. Although they are durable, easy to clean, and relatively non-reactive, stainless steel does contain nickel and may cause allergic reactions in people who are sensitive to it.

Teflon. Nonstick surfaces allow you to use less oil when cooking, and they make cleaning a breeze. Yet, Teflon and other nonstick coatings are made with a toxic chemical called perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

PFOA persists in the environment and can cause cancer and birth defects in animals, but its effects on humans remain unclear. Although DuPont, the maker of Teflon, maintains that no appreciable amounts of PFOA leach into foods during cooking, the company and several other manufacturers have pledged by the year 2010 to reduce trace amounts of the compound in consumer products and in manufacturing emissions by 95 percent. That's good news, but Teflon presents yet another problem—when you heat a nonstick pan to a high enough temperature, the coating breaks down and releases fumes that can cause flu-like symptoms. There is some disagreement about the temperature at which this process begins. I would strongly urge you not to leave Teflon-coated pans unattended on the stovetop and to add liquid to them when frying to keep the temperature down.

My bottom line: I use Chantal enameled cast-iron and All-Clad pots and pans (layered aluminum and copper sandwiched between stainless steel) for most of my cooking. I recommend stainless steel cookware to most people because it's safe, efficient, and reasonably priced. 

Ask Dr. Weil MSG; Gum Disease; Colon Cleansing; and More

Can I raise my white blood cell count naturally?

You can. Lower white blood cell counts are a common concern of cancer patients during and after chemotherapy, because these potent drugs suppress the bone marrow that contains these cells. I often suggest taking the herb astragalus for its immune-boosting properties, including increasing white blood cell counts. Astragalus is available in liquid or tablet form; follow package directions.

Certain mushrooms, such as reishi and maitake, have also been shown in studies to increase immune function and white blood cell activity. Try a combination product containing a mixture of mushroom species like MycoSoft Gold from Fungi Perfecti (fungi.com or 800-780-9126), following the dose on the label. My own Immune Support Formula (drugstore.com or 800-378-4786) contains astragalus and medicinal mushrooms. Astragalus, reishi, and maitake have also been shown to slow the growth of cancerous cells and reduce side effects of chemotherapy, like nausea and vomiting.

Plus, I suggest trying mind-body techniques, which can influence immune system function. Some useful products are Dr. Steven Gurgevich's self-hypnosis recording *Cancer Chemotherapy Support* (to order, visit tranceformation.com or call 866-506-1700) and Belleruth Naparstek's guided-imagery recording designed for chemotherapy patients (to order, visit healthjourneys.com or call 800-800-8661).

Is MSG harmful to your health?

Iwould avoid consuming monosodium glutamate (MSG) and look at food labels closely or inquire in restaurants to find out if it's an ingredient. Many people are sensitive to this food additive, which is frequently used as a flavor enhancer in Chinese food, canned vegetables, soups, and processed meat. A common reaction is a headache. Other symptoms may include flushing, tingling sensations, facial pressure, chest pain, nausea, and vomiting. MSG can also trigger breathing difficulties in people with asthma. I consider MSG an unnecessary source of additional sodium in the diet.

Your Stimulating Breath exercise makes my heart race and leaves me anxious. Why is this happening?

Perhaps you're sensitive to the energizing effects of this yoga-derived breathing exercise, which is part of my morning routine and I do whenever I need a quick pick-me-up. Also called the bellows breath, this technique involves breathing in and out very rapidly through your nose while keeping your mouth lightly closed. I typically recommend people start by doing the exercise just once a day for no longer than 10 or 15 seconds, and then increase the duration by five seconds each time until they work up to a full minute. But if you find the technique overly stimulating, try doing it for no more than five seconds at first, then gradually build up to longer periods over a month or two.

What are the best ways to treat periodontal disease?

The key to preventing and treating gum disease is good oral hygiene. Periodontal disease, including gingivitis, is caused by poor nutrition and a buildup of plaque, resulting in red, swollen, tender gums that bleed easily when you brush your teeth. Stress, a depressed immune system, diabetes, and hormonal changes are added risk factors.

The best natural treatments include brushing with a soft toothbrush at least twice a day, flossing daily (preferably with unwaxed floss, which creates more friction than waxed), massaging your gums with a Waterpik once a day, applying a paste of baking soda (which helps remove plaque) and hydrogen peroxide (which kills germs) to the gums once a day, and having your teeth cleaned professionally twice a year. Use natural toothpastes containing tea tree oil or neem. Tea tree oil has germicidal properties, and neem (from a tree native to India) reduces plaque and prevents bacterial growth.

Also, make sure your diet includes foods rich in vitamin C and calcium; a deficiency of these nutrients can contribute to gum disease. Cranberries are not only high in vitamin C, but also help prevent bacteria from sticking to your gums. And a new study suggests that a diet rich in whole grains may reduce the risk of gum disease, perhaps by lowering blood glucose levels (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, June 2006). Plus, my periodontist friends say their gingivitis patients who supplement with Coenzyme Q10 have good results. Take 60 to 100 mg of a softgel form each day with your largest meal.

Do you think that colon cleansing is a good idea for diverticulitis? Can you offer any other advice?

I don't recommend it. Colon cleansing, in which up to 30 gallons of warm water is run through the colon to flush waste from the intestinal tract, is potentially dangerous to people with diverticulitis because the force of the water and exposure to waste products might increase infection and inflammation. (In general, I think colonics are unnecessary.) Diverticulitis develops when diverticula—abnormal pouches that form in the wall of the digestive tract—become infected or inflamed, causing constipation, bloating, or pain in the lower abdomen.

Instead of colonic irrigation, I recommend lifestyle measures to both prevent and ease diverticulitis. Eat a high-fiber diet providing 20 to 40 grams of fiber a day. To help get more roughage, take a psyllium seed supplement, which should be swallowed with plenty of water to avoid constipation. Look for the powdered seed husks sold at health food stores; follow package directions. Herbal remedies such as enteric-coated peppermint oil and slippery elm powder are also helpful. Take one to two capsules of peppermint oil three times a day between meals, to relax the digestive tract. Slippery elm, which helps heal irritated tissues, can be made into a gruel by mixing one teaspoon of the powder with one teaspoon of sugar, then add two cups of boiling water; drink one to two cups twice a day. Regular exercise releases pressure in the

bowels. I also suggest avoiding caffeine and tobacco, which are irritating to the gastrointestinal tract.

Should men take saw palmetto to prevent an enlarged prostate? Is it dangerous as a preventive?

Although I recommend that men try saw palmetto berry (*Serenoa repens*) to treat an enlarged prostate, especially in the early stages, I don't know of any data suggesting the herb will prevent the condition. I asked Aaron Katz, MD, director of the Center for Holistic Urology at Columbia University

and author of *Dr. Katz's Guide to Prostate Health* (Freedom Press, 2006), for his opinion. "I don't think saw palmetto would do any harm," says Dr. Katz, "but it's hard to tell how much it would help." Saw palmetto hasn't been studied for prevention, and the causes of this noncancerous growth of tissue inside the prostate are unclear, although researchers believe that with age, the gland becomes more sensitive to the growth-stimulating effect of male hormones. **SP**

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Breathe Better with Asthma. People with mild to moderate asthma who practiced a few minutes of breathing techniques before turning to their inhalers dramatically reduced their use of medication, Australian researchers found. The study looked at 57 people with asthma, who were taught by instructional video one of two breathing exercises: shallow nasal breathing and breath holding, or controlled mouth and nasal breathing along with physical exercises for the arms and shoulders. Both breathing methods were done twice a day for 30 weeks and proved similarly effective in decreasing participants' dependence on beta-agonist inhalers by 86 percent and inhaled corticosteroids by 50 percent. (*Thorax Online*, June 5, 2006)

Comment: I'm delighted to see positive outcomes on the clinical application of breath work, techniques that I've long recommended to those with asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions. These methods are easy to learn, cost nothing, and are worth practicing for therapeutic reasons or basic relaxation.

Fish Oil Fails to Stop Arrhythmias. Fish oil may offer little protection against abnormal heart rhythms associated with sudden cardiac death in people with implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs). Nearly 550 participants in a three-year study took 2 grams of a fish oil supplement or a placebo daily. During the study, 81 patients in the fish oil group died or had heart shocks from their ICDs, compared with 90 in the placebo group. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 14, 2006)

Comment: Although this study was well designed, it doesn't apply to most people and doesn't detract from the general health benefits of fish oil supplements, which are well established for optimum health. Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, fish oil has been shown to reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death from heart arrhythmias in other studies. I take 2 grams of fish oil a day to prevent heart problems, reduce inflammation, and optimize brain function.

More Black Marks for NSAIDs. Survivors of a first heart attack have a higher risk of dying or having a second attack if they're taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), according to a recent study. Researchers looked at more than 58,000 patients who had survived a heart attack between 1995 and 2002 and their usage of NSAIDs. Regular use of a low dose of a COX-2 inhibitor approximately doubled the risk of dying and increased the chance of having another heart attack by nearly 50 percent. At higher doses, mortality risk increased fivefold. Any use of over-the-counter NSAIDs like ibuprofen upped the risk of death, but for those taking high daily doses the odds of dying doubled or quadrupled depending on the drug taken, and the risk of another heart attack went up from 22 to 89 percent. (*Circulation*, June 20, 2006)

Comment: Neither older NSAIDs nor newer COX-2 inhibitors are benign. Both carry risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. This study just adds to the growing body of evidence that people should limit their reliance on these drugs and look for alternative pain-relief approaches.

Quitting Hormone Therapy. For women wishing to quit hormone therapy, it may matter little if you stop suddenly or ease off the drugs gradually. That's what a recent study found that looked at 91 postmenopausal women who had been on hormone therapy for an average of nine years and wanted to stop. About half were asked to quit abruptly, and the others tapered the dose over several months. Hot flashes were more common in the first three months after discontinuing hormone therapy among women who went "cold turkey." But six months after stopping, hot flashes were more common among those who eased off slowly. After nine to 12 months, there was no difference between the two groups. (*Menopause*, May/June 2006)

Comment: Because hormone therapy may increase the risk of cardiovascular problems and certain cancers, women should use the lowest effective dose to ease menopausal symptoms for the shortest time possible. For my thoughts on natural alternatives to hormone therapy, see the July 2005 issue. **SP**

Basic Training Techniques from Back Boot Camp

When your back goes out, do you head for the couch? Maybe you'd be better off heading for the gym. Although doctors once advised people with back pain to take it easy, guidelines now make it clear that most people recover from back pain sooner if they stay active. A day or two of rest may be okay in the early stages of acute back pain, but longer periods of inactivity just lead to physical deconditioning of the muscles, tendons, and ligaments and more prolonged pain. A pioneering approach called aggressive spinal rehabilitation makes the case that the solution to this problem is not a little exercise—but a lot. Proponents of these “back boot camps” say that a month or two of really intense physical activity can actually restore normal function even to individuals who have suffered from chronic and debilitating back pain for years.

The Spine Center at New England Baptist Hospital in Boston was among the first hospital-based aggressive rehab clinics for back pain now scattered across the country. Its director, James Rainville, MD, a doctor of physical medicine and rehabilitation (physiatrist) and assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School, is a firm believer that the old medical advice to “let pain be your guide” with regard to exercise is dead wrong. In fact, the mantra at Dr. Rainville's clinic is, “Hurt doesn't necessarily cause harm.” The focus at his clinic is on improving physical ability, not on preventing pain. New patients are told that exercise *will* hurt at first as weakened muscles and connective tissue struggle with the new physical demands on them. But they are also told to work through any pain, much as an injured athlete would. “We really don't back down on that,” insists Dr. Rainville. In the 15 years since the clinic opened, thousands of people with back pain have learned that if they push through their initial pain instead of quitting, they will eventually raise their pain thresholds and become strong and flexible enough to lead normal lives once again.

How it works. The Spine Center's six-week program of twice-a-week, hour-and-a-half workouts is supervised by specially trained physical therapists. It incorporates all three major forms of exercise—aerobic, stretching, and strength training on Nautilus-style machines—as well as simulations of real-world activities such as lifting heavy grocery bags or kids. Patients' physical abilities are assessed at entry, then their exercise programs are based on meeting slowly rising, clearly achievable “quotas” of exercise duration or intensity. Participants spend the first week or two focusing on exercise form and technique, and the following weeks pushing

to become as strong as they can. They are then given a maintenance program to follow at home.

As patients meet their goals and see evidence they're becoming stronger and more flexible, their attitudes change from “I won't be able to do this with my fragile back” to “I can do this—and more.” Although some aggressive rehab programs have a specific cognitive-behavioral therapy component, the psychological element to the program at The Spine Center is not as obvious. “Exercise to some extent is just the tool that helps patients overcome their fears and allows them to see that they can safely live a normal life again,” suggests Dr. Rainville.

No matter what their initial diagnosis—spinal stenosis, spondylolisthesis, herniated disc, or even failed-back-surgery syndrome—all patients go through the same basic program, and most of them become stronger, more flexible, and more active with less pain. In fact, Dr. Rainville reports that normal function is restored in 70 percent of the approximately 2,000 people who go through this rehabilitation each year, and studies at other clinics that offer a similar aggressive rehab approach have shown similar success rates.

Lessons learned. I am impressed that clinics such as The Spine Center help people with back pain concentrate on becoming stronger, fitter, and more self-reliant rather than depending on medical procedures and drugs that just address their pain. I think the most important lessons to be learned from aggressive rehabilitation are not to let pain or the fear of it stop you from living a normal life and to be prepared to work very hard to achieve your goal. Studies have found that over time an intense exercise program can actually normalize an oversensitive pain response. To get these results, however, you have to work to the outer limit of your abilities. If there isn't an aggressive rehab program near you, it might be a good idea to find a professional such as a physical therapist at a sports medicine clinic or a certified fitness trainer who can help you set and meet your exercise goals safely and keep you from quitting too soon.

Restoring your back will require motivation, time, and hard work—and okay, maybe a little pain. And this approach involves being actively committed to regaining normal function and taking responsibility for your recovery. But aren't a few hours of discomfort worth it to be able to run, or work, or pick up your grandkids again?

For more on low back pain, order our new special report, *Low Back Pain: An Integrative Medicine Treatment Program* (\$19.95 plus shipping), at (888) 337-9345. 

next issue

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The Safety of Plastics

Attitude and Aging

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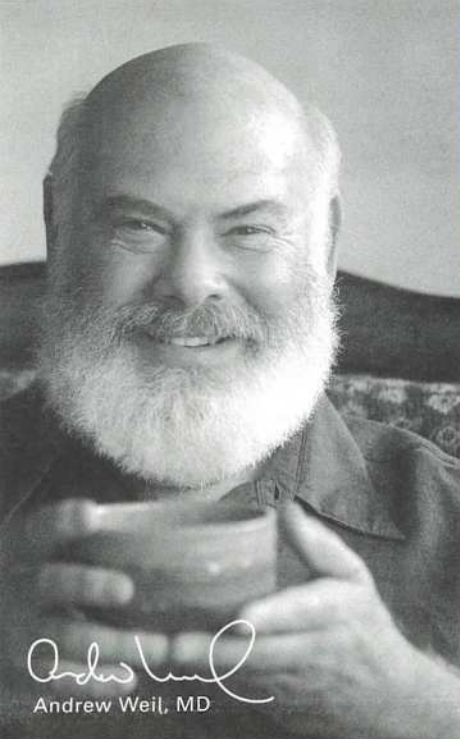
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SEPTEMBER 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

ON MY MIND

Eye Massage

After a busy day staring at a computer or reading, your eyes might feel dry or tired. To soothe them and perk up your peepers, I suggest that you try these simple self-massage techniques, either separately or together. Make sure to remove your contact lenses or glasses beforehand.

Palms. Start by rubbing your hands together to warm them up. Cup hands over both eyes, placing the heels of your palms on your cheekbones and resting your elbows on a table. Concentrate on your breathing. After a minute or two, apply light pressure to each eye with the heel of your palm and hold for a minute.

Fingers. Place your thumbs on the inner corners of the eyebrows, pressing gently for several seconds. Apply pressure at various points around the perimeter of the eye. Repeat this technique using your fingertips, massaging gently outward from the corners, instead of applying pressure.

End each of these exercises by opening your eyes wide for a moment and taking some deep breaths—enjoying this relaxed, refreshed feeling. 

Attitude Is Everything with Aging

As I wrote in my recent book *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005), acceptance of aging is the first step in developing a positive attitude toward growing older and doing so gracefully. Yet in our youth-oriented culture, it's common to look at the negative aspects of aging rather than at the positives. Despite the physical changes that life brings, your mind can maintain an optimistic and youthful outlook. Here are four good reasons to keep looking on the bright side.

Live longer. Having a positive perception of aging can prolong life expectancy, while a negative one might diminish it. Researchers matched data from questionnaires collected some 20 years earlier with mortality rates for 660 men and women aged 50 and over. They found that older people who responded more positively to survey questions about aging lived roughly 7.5 years longer than those who viewed it as a negative experience (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, August 2002). The scientists suggested that a will to live only partially explains the longevity, while the impact of negative views of aging might be unconsciously influencing self-perception and elevating stress levels.

Need more reason to see the glass as half full? A study of nearly 1,000 older adults followed for nine years concluded that people with high levels of optimism had a 23 percent lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease and a 55 percent lower risk of death from all causes compared to their more pessimistic peers (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, November 2004). It's not clear why, but it may be that optimists have better coping strategies or just take better care of themselves.

Have a better memory. When older people were shown positive words such as *knowledgeable* and *wisdom* before memory tests, they performed significantly better than individuals shown negative terms about aging such as *senile* and *confused*. Researchers speculate that if older people are treated like competent members of society, they perform that

way. This is true for older adults in China—a society where elders are revered—who fared better on memory tests in a study than older Americans. In intriguing research, middle-aged adults did worse on a word-recall test when they were told their scores were being compared to people aged 70 and older, but did better when they thought they were competing against folks under 25. Memory performance seemed poorest in people most fearful of aging (*Social Cognition*, June 2006).

Stay healthier. Older people who felt more positive about old age were found to walk at a pace 9 percent faster than those who viewed it negatively. (Walking speed is a good measure of overall physical fitness.) Other research has found that older persons with a positive outlook were significantly less likely to become frail, while those with negative feelings toward aging performed worse on hearing tests, possibly because they were accepting of hearing loss and less apt to seek medical attention for the problem.

Boost immunity. In one study looking at more than 300 people aged 70 and over, individuals who continually dwelt on negative thoughts had higher white blood cell counts, as if their bodies were trying to fight off infection. Yet, researchers didn't find a similar response in younger people who had recurring negativity (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, May–June 2004). Optimism may well have a protective effect on immunity. 

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Each year, some 3,700 US women die from cervical cancer. That number could fall dramatically thanks to a newly approved vaccine that targets the human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted infection known to cause most cervical cancers. In June, a federal advisory panel recommended the vaccine be routinely given to girls at age 11 or 12. The vaccine, which involves three shots over six months, is most effective if given before girls become sexually active, but the panel said girls and women aged 13 to 26 would benefit from getting immunized.

My colleague Victoria Maizes, MD, the executive director of the Program in Integrative Medicine, calls the vaccine "a wonderful advance," and she supports the advisory panel's recommendations. She says the vaccine appears very effective against two strains of HPV that account for roughly 70 percent of all cervical cancers and two other strains that cause about 90 percent of genital wart cases. She notes that the vaccine doesn't eliminate the need for Pap tests, which can detect cervical cancers and precancerous lesions caused by other HPV strains.

I find the idea of anti-cancer vaccines very appealing. The HPV vaccine isn't the first to protect against a risk factor for cancer: The hepatitis B vaccine prevents not only that acute disease but also chronic hepatitis that can lead to cancer. Plus, researchers are working on therapeutic vaccines to treat cancer, not prevent it. Personalized vaccines made from the patient's own tumor cells have been found to prolong the survival of some people with advanced melanoma. Other therapeutic vaccines are being studied for breast, prostate, and lung cancers, among others. Stay tuned for more developments in this exciting field.



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The Art of Chinese Pulse Diagnosis

When a doctor or nurse takes your pulse by placing two fingers on your wrist, they are assessing your heart's health by counting the number of beats per minute and noticing if you have a regular or irregular heart rate. But in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), pulse reading is far more complex and may uncover problems throughout the body.

How it works. A TCM practitioner takes many pulses on each patient, and the process can take anywhere from two to 15 minutes. The practitioner places three fingers on each wrist in turn, at two different levels of pressure (superficial and deep), for a total of 12 pulses (two under each finger). At the superficial level, the fingers rest lightly on the pulse, while a deeper reading is taken as fingers push down until the pulse briefly stops and then beats again. A skilled and experienced practitioner feels for pulse rate, depth, strength, texture, rhythm, and length. For example, a pulse might be slow, deep (felt only when heavy pressure is applied), and taut (with the texture of a taut rope).

Each of the 12 pulses is believed to correspond with a particular organ system such as the large intestine or liver, and the different

pulse qualities help the practitioner determine if there are imbalances in the flow of life energy, or *qi*. If your pulse reading and other noninvasive diagnostic techniques reveal excesses or deficiencies of energy, the practitioner will develop an individualized treatment plan that may involve acupuncture, herbal formulas, dietary changes, tai chi, medical qigong (a form of energy medicine), and massage.

"Learning the art of pulse diagnosis takes years," says my friend and colleague Alex Holland, a licensed acupuncturist and author of *Voices of Qi* (North Atlantic Books, 2000) who teaches at the Program in Integrative Medicine. "But in the hands of a master, it's a profound method of obtaining information about an individual's health." Another practitioner told me he thinks of the pulses as a 12-piece orchestra and tries to determine which instruments are playing out of tune.

My take. I believe pulse diagnosis is very reliable in the conceptual framework of TCM, which I've found can benefit allergic, autoimmune, digestive, infectious, musculoskeletal, and other conditions. To find a TCM practitioner, visit nccaom.org. 

The Widespread Effects of Chronic Stress

When fleeing saber-toothed tigers, your ancestors relied on the stress hormone cortisol to trigger the fight-or-flight reaction. It quickly raised heart rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar, helping people defend themselves against danger or escape it. Today, cortisol comes to the rescue when you make a last-minute swerve to avoid a fender-bender. But not all stressors in the modern world are life-threatening and you're faced with a continual barrage of them—looming deadlines, unexpected bills, and gridlocked highways—that kick the sympathetic nervous system into high gear for longer than necessary. This floods the body and brain with stress hormones and keeps cortisol levels higher than they should be for health and well-being. The result?

A great deal of emotional upset and physical illness.

For years, I've advised minimizing cortisol's physical and psychological damage by practicing stress-protection techniques from meditation and music to guided imagery and yoga. I also think it's a good idea to know your enemy, so let's take a closer look at how high levels of cortisol harm the body.

Inflammation and cardiovascular disease. A strong link between stress and heart disease was first identified more than 25 years ago. Only recently have researchers figured out how stress actually wreaks havoc with the cardiovascular system. It turns out that high cortisol levels cause chronic inflammation of the lining of the blood vessels. This inflammation damages artery walls and promotes atherosclerosis, the build-up of cholesterol-rich deposits that narrow arteries and cause heart disease and strokes. Stress-induced inflammation may also explain why one-third of heart disease patients don't have other risk factors, like obesity or high cholesterol.

Weakened immune function. Many studies show that chronic emotional stress reduces the immune system's ability to protect you from infection. Several fascinating studies have focused on elderly people under severe chronic stress from caring for spouses suffering dementia. Scientists at England's University of Bristol led by Kavita Vedhara, PhD, investigated how stress affects flu vaccination. (A flu shot does not kill this virus directly. Rather, it stimulates an immune response to thwart the virus.) They compared responses to flu vaccine among 50 caregivers and 67 matched controls, who were not caring for demented spouses. Chronic stress depressed the caregivers' immune systems to the point that they were significantly less able to mount an effective immune response to flu vaccination (*Lancet*, February 20, 1999). When caregivers practiced relaxation skills, their cortisol levels declined and immune systems rebounded (*Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, September–October 2003). "Stress management optimizes health in people facing chronic stress," says Vedhara.

Memory loss and cognitive impairment. In school, did you ever learn something, know it, and then forget it during a test? Tests can be nerve-racking, and stress-induced high cortisol levels interfere with memory and reasoning. To study its influence, researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis gave volunteers either cortisol at a dose consistent with major emotional stress or a dummy pill.

Can Supplements Help?

Several supplements like CortiSlim, CortiVarin, and TheraStress claim to ease stress and help in weight loss by reducing cortisol. But don't waste your money on them. While their ingredients—vitamins, minerals, and various herbal extracts including green tea and ginseng—are unlikely to cause harm at recommended doses, I'm not aware of any published research showing these supplements actually lessen stress or cortisol, let alone help people shed pounds. The research on cortisol and weight has to do with *where* people carry their weight (abdominally if cortisol is high), not *how much* they carry. Instead of spending \$25 or more for a month's supply, you're better off following a sensible diet, getting regular physical activity, and practicing relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga.

People who took cortisol did not perform as well on memory tests compared to the placebo group (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, June 1999). And McGill University studies show that chronically high cortisol levels can actually shrink the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory.

Insomnia. As cortisol levels increase, the body becomes more physiologically aroused, which interferes with sleep. Scientists measured the cortisol levels of chronic insomniacs compared to people without sleep problems and found insomniacs had significantly higher cortisol levels (*Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, August 2001). In another study, researchers gave chronic insomniacs a drug that reduces cortisol. After three weeks on this medication, their sleep quality improved significantly (*Psychopharmacology*, December 2003).

Abdominal fat. Where you carry fat affects your health. Many studies have shown that excess abdominal fat (a beer belly) increases the risk for liver disease, as well as for diabetes and high blood pressure. Guess what increases the chance of developing excess abdominal fat? Cortisol. It's not clear if high levels of the hormone cause accumulation of belly fat directly, or if the stress associated with high levels impairs people's judgment about food selection and portion sizes. But cortisol increases appetite, and one way or the other, it appears that high levels are associated with excess abdominal fat and the potentially fatal conditions linked to it.

Chronic stress also increases the risk of depression, heartburn, and sexual problems. In addition, stress is known to aggravate pain, acne, eczema, hives, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, premenstrual syndrome, and inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis).

Cortisol levels fluctuate during the day: They're highest in the morning and lowest around midnight. As levels fall, you become more relaxed and less likely to suffer the many conditions caused or aggravated by stress. **SP**

Living Better with Plastics

Plastic is hailed as one of the world's greatest inventions. While its use in products such as helmets and computers makes lives safer and tasks easier, I'm wary of many kitchen plastics used to protect and serve meals. Recent studies show that when some plastics come in contact with food, certain chemicals migrate to the food and may cause an array of health problems. Scientists fear that even low levels of these chemicals may reduce immunity and alter behavior in adults and cause cancers and irreversible organ damage in fetuses and children. The good news is that you don't have to give up the convenience of your favorite plastic, because in almost all cases there are similar products made from a safer plastic or other material.

A Closer Look at Four Problem Plastics

In June, San Francisco banned the manufacturing, sale, and distribution of child-care products and toys containing certain phthalates and bisphenol A, both hormone-disrupting chemicals found in some plastics that are thought to interfere with childhood development. The European Union has similar bans on phthalates.

Bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is found in many polycarbonate plastic products (often labeled as #7), such as plastic labeled as microwavable, eating utensils, linings for metal food and beverage containers, baby bottles, and other products. I believe San Francisco's measure to ban BPA in children's products is justified. BPA is a hormone disrupter, a chemical that alters the body's normal hormonal activity and mimics the effects of estrogen. In mice and rats, exposure to BPA has led to miscarriages, birth defects, and mental retardation, as well as early puberty, breast and prostate cancers, and reduced sperm counts. In laboratory studies, this chemical has been shown to inhibit the formation of connections in a part of the brain called the hippocampus, or memory center.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention detected BPA in the urine of a majority of the thousands of people it tested in the United States. Frederick vom Saal, PhD, a professor of reproductive biology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, has been researching the effects of these chemicals for more than 30 years and is convinced they're a danger to health, especially for children and fetuses. He and his colleagues looked at human cells and BPA and were astonished at the small amount of chemicals needed to alter the cells. Since then, more than 40 studies have confirmed the negative effect of low doses of BPA on human cells and mouse cells, where they produced an almost identical response. More studies show BPA's cell-altering effects at higher levels.

I'm concerned about these findings. Normal wear and tear of plastics causes chemicals to leach. "In adults, high levels affect behaviors and the immune system, but babies are ruined for life," says vom Saal. Of particular concern is the abundance of baby bottles on the market containing BPA. *Consumer Reports* tested hard plastic baby bottles and found that even after multiple washings, they continued to leach BPA. "When you boil them in water, you have an estrogen cocktail," says vom Saal.

"Many countries, in fact, have banned polycarbonate dishes and cutlery," says vom Saal. "In Japan, consumer use of polycarbonate is crashing." Recent state bills in California, Maryland, and Minnesota that proposed a ban on children's products containing high levels of BPA haven't fared as well as legislation did in San Francisco.

My advice:

- Microwave food in glass or ceramic, never in plastic.
- Unfortunately, cans are not labeled that they contain BPA. Once opened, notice the canned products that are lined with plastic and try to avoid them.
- Switch to baby bottles made of glass or opaque pastel-colored #4 or #5 plastic. (Evenflo and Gerber offer nontoxic bottles.) I'm not concerned about toddlers' sippy cups, which are made from safe #5 and polyethylene #2 plastic.

Polystyrene. Polystyrene, labeled as #6, is often found in foam containers and cups and sometimes in clear dis-

posable takeout containers, plastic cutlery, and cups. Polystyrene may leach styrene, a possible human carcinogen, into food it comes in contact with. Studies involving mice show that when it's ingested over several weeks, this chemical can damage the liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain.

My advice:

- Avoid consuming hot liquids, fatty foods, or alcoholic drinks from Styrofoam containers, since heat and alcohol may increase leaching of the chemical.
- Transfer foods from takeout containers made of Styrofoam to glass or ceramic.

Good and Bad Plastics by the Numbers

Plastics to Avoid

TYPE	WHERE YOU'LL FIND IT
#3 polyvinyl chloride (V or PVC)	plastic wrap, cooking oil bottles
#6 polystyrene (PS)	Styrofoam
#7 other (usually polycarbonate made with bisphenol A)	microwavable plastics, eating utensils, linings for metal food and beverage containers, baby bottles

Safer Plastics

#1 polyethylene terephthalate (PET or PETE)	soft drink and water bottles
#2 high-density polyethylene (HDPE)	milk and water bottles
#4 low-density polyethylene (LDPE)	wrapping films, grocery bags
#5 polypropylene (PP)	yogurt containers, syrup bottles

Adipates and Phthalates. Many plastic-wrapped foods in grocery stores, such as meats and cheeses, are wrapped in polyvinyl chloride (PVC), often labeled as #3 plastic. To make PVC plastic flexible, manufacturers add chemicals called plasticizers. These chemicals, known as adipates and phthalates, can leach out of the PVC into food, especially hot, fatty foods. In mice, these chemicals have been shown to cause birth defects, fetal death, and damage to the liver, kidneys, lungs, and reproductive systems. Di-(2-ethylhexyl) adipate, or DEHA, is one plasticizer used in many plastic wraps. In one study by the Consumers Union, 19 pieces of cheese wrapped in plastic were analyzed and the seven that were wrapped in PVC plastic contained consistently high levels of DEHA. Levels averaged 153 parts per million; the European Union's limit is 18 parts per million for DEHA migration from plastic to food.

My advice:

- Since many plastics used to wrap meat and cheese are made from PVC, I take these items out of the plastic and wrap them in one of my favorite kitchen tools—wax paper. You

can also store them in a glass or ceramic dish covered with a lid or a piece of PVC-free plastic wrap (not touching the food), such as Glad Cling Wrap or Saran Cling Plus.

- Never let plastic wrap touch food in the microwave.
- Some cooking oils are sold in plastic bottles made from PVC. Only store oils in glass bottles.

Selecting the Right Water Bottle

All soft plastics have the potential to leach chemicals into food and beverages, including disposable and reusable bottles. Here are a few practical tips:

- Avoid reusing single-use plastic bottles. Frequent washing of disposable plastic bottles may accelerate its breakdown and cause chemicals called adipates to leach.
- Toss the bottle of water that's been sitting in your car. Solar heat can do as much damage as the microwave.
- Some plastic bottles are made from BPA, so use stainless steel water bottles (visit kleankanteen.com). 

Choosing Vitamin C: A Buyer's Guide

Many people say they benefit from taking extra vitamin C at the first sign of a cold, and I recommend taking 200 mg as part of a daily antioxidant regimen to reduce the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic ailments. With all the different forms of vitamin C on the market, knowing which kind is right for you can be confusing. I'll look at several different options below. Even if you're supplementing with vitamin C, it's still important to get the vitamin from food, says Balz Frei, PhD, a vitamin C expert and director of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, because you "get many other beneficial vitamins, as well as minerals, phytochemicals, and fiber in addition to the vitamin C." Vitamin C can be found in many fruits and vegetables. Some good dietary sources include broccoli, cauliflower, strawberries, citrus fruits, kiwi, cantaloupe, Brussels sprouts, and green pepper.

Pills, powders, or chewables?

Because of the high bioavailability of vitamin C, there is little difference between forms such as powders, capsules, and tablets in terms of absorption into the body. Occasionally, I will take Emergen-C, a powdered drink

mix that provides 1,000 mg of vitamin C, to short-circuit a cold, but you don't need that much of the vitamin regularly. Large, hard tablets might not dissolve completely in the stomach. Capsules work well, but there is research suggesting the time-release capsules that claim to boost absorption actually decrease it, so I'd avoid spending extra money on them. Chewable tablets often contain sugar and may erode tooth enamel, so I'd avoid these types too.

Ascorbic acid. This is the chemical name for vitamin C, and it's also the most widely used and least expensive form. Research has shown no difference in effectiveness or absorption between natural and synthetic L-ascorbic acid, so paying more for "natural" vitamin C is not worth the cost. Some people find that ascorbic acid is too acidic for their stomachs.

Buffered vitamin C. This form is also known as mineral ascorbates, meaning chemically turned into a mineral salt. The most common types are sodium ascorbate and calcium ascorbate. These products are less acidic than ascorbic acid, and some research has shown they can be gentler on your stomach. But there is no advantage to this form in terms of

absorption, so unless you find ascorbic acid too harsh on your gastrointestinal tract, there is no need to buy this more expensive form.

Ester-C. This patented form of calcium ascorbate has added ingredients, such as C metabolites. While I find minimal scientific support for a claim that Ester-C is more bioavailable, its mineral ascorbate formulation does provide some buffering when combined with other vitamins, as in a multivitamin. But if all you are looking for is just vitamin C, I'd agree with Dr. Frei that there is no need to pay extra for Ester-C.

Extra ingredients. Some vitamin C supplements have extra ingredients such as bioflavonoids or rose hips. Bioflavonoids are plant pigments that have antioxidant properties and are said to increase absorption of vitamin C, but there is little evidence to support this claim. Although bioflavonoids have many useful effects, I think the best way to get them is by adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet. Rose hips, the fruit of the rose plant, are a natural source of vitamin C, but most products contain only a small amount and the vitamin itself won't be of any higher quality, just more expensive. 

Ask Dr. Weil Creatine; Fibrocystic Breasts; & More

My 16-year-old daughter was just diagnosed with Bell's palsy. What can she do to increase her chances of a full and quick recovery?

Although time is the best healer, there are a few natural approaches to aid your daughter's recovery from Bell's palsy. Also called facial palsy, this temporary paralysis or weakness of facial muscles is due to an inflamed facial nerve, resulting in a droopy appearance on one side of the face that may prevent the person from blinking. Symptoms usually disappear on their own within two weeks, and most people recover fully in about three months. While the cause of Bell's palsy is unknown, it's often associated with the herpes simplex virus 1, transmitted by contact with infected saliva, or herpes zoster virus, also known as shingles.

I recommend people try techniques to stimulate nerves and naturally reduce inflammation. Acupuncture has been shown in a few small studies to improve function, especially when combined with moxibustion, another Chinese medicine technique that stimulates the acupuncture points by burning the herb mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) over the inflamed area. Your daughter may also want to take a B-50 B-complex supplement to promote proper nerve function and try freeze-dried capsules of lion's mane mushroom (*Hericium erinaceus*), which has been shown to enhance the immune system and stimulate nerve growth factors. Lion's mane is available at fungiperfecti.com; follow package directions.

Many physicians prescribe corticosteroids to reduce the inflammation caused by Bell's palsy, but scientific reviews suggest no significant benefit for most patients, and these drugs have many side effects. Instead, I recommend taking Zyflamend, a blend of anti-inflammatory herbs available in softgel or liquid form. Also, your doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs if the cause is herpes.

My 15-year-old son is on his school's baseball team and asked me to buy him creatine. What do you advise?

I do not recommend creatine monohydrate for your son or anyone else. Creatine is a substance found naturally in muscle cells, and its breakdown during exercise releases energy that helps muscles to contract and the body to produce protein, which helps build muscles. The claims for the supplemental form, most commonly creatine monohydrate, are that it will increase muscle mass and improve athletic performance, particularly in short-term, high-intensity activities such as hitting a baseball. While a small number of studies show an increase in short-term muscle strength with the use of supplemental creatine, the research is conflicting, suggesting that any increase in body weight may be due to water retention rather than an increase in muscle mass.

Although short-term studies have shown few side effects, I'm concerned that long-term use of creatine may cause kidney and liver damage. There has been no research on the supplement's safety and effectiveness in people younger

than 19, which I find alarming, especially considering the number of high school athletes who take it. Until we see more long-term research, particularly in younger people, I'd discourage your son from using supplemental creatine.

Is there a vitamin I can take to make my fingernails strong and stop them from splitting?

Fingernails that split easily are commonly caused by frequent exposure to water. You can prevent this by wearing rubber gloves when you keep your hands in water—when ever washing dishes, for example. Water actually dries out the nails. You should also try to avoid direct contact with detergents, paint, gasoline, and other harsh chemicals. I'd also limit the use of nail polish and nail polish remover, especially those with acetone, which is especially drying.

I don't recommend a vitamin to strengthen your nails, but rather a supplement of GLA—gamma-linolenic acid—an essential fatty acid that's hard to come by in the diet. GLA can prevent your nails from splitting and also make your hair and skin healthier. Two good sources are evening primrose oil and black currant oil, both available in capsule form. (I would avoid borage oil, another source of GLA, because borage contains toxins in its roots and leaves that may damage the liver.) Black currant oil generally has a higher percentage of GLA than evening primrose oil but is more expensive. Take 500 mg of either product twice a day for two months before deciding if the treatment is working for you. It's safe to stay on this remedy indefinitely.

What can I do about sagging, excess skin after weight loss?

Excess skin is often a result of massive weight loss, usually more than 100 pounds. The most common areas for sagging skin are the abdomen, breasts, thighs, and arms. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do after the weight has been lost. The cause of sagging skin is decreased elasticity. You can exercise muscles, but there is no exercise routine for the skin. I suggest you wait a year after your weight loss to see if the skin conforms to your new shape, and consider plastic surgery as a last resort.

The amount of excess skin after weight loss depends on many factors, including how long you have been overweight, how fast you lost the weight, and your age. Individuals in the process of losing a significant amount of weight can help maintain the skin's elasticity and prevent sagging by doing strength-training exercises that focus on toning muscles, in addition to getting regular aerobic exercise. You should train every muscle group in your body, two to three days a week. I suggest alternating between free weights (such as dumbbells and barbells) and Nautilus machines, although those who are more experienced in strength training may want to concentrate on free weights. Your skin will stay the most elastic if you vary your strength-training program in terms of intensity, resistance, order, and number of sets.

Are there any natural treatments for fibrocystic breasts?

Yes, there are some remedies to lessen the symptoms of fibrocystic breast disease. Women with fibrocystic breasts have benign lumps that can cause tenderness, pain, and swelling. The lumps are usually round and move beneath the skin when you press on them, and become more bothersome during the monthly menstrual cycle due to hormonal changes.

To lessen symptoms, I first suggest eliminating all sources of caffeine (including chocolate), which promotes fluid retention. Eat a low-fat diet and minimize foods that may contain estrogen, such as beef and dairy products. Increase your intake of soy products (the phytoestrogens in soy may improve the body's hormonal balance) and omega-3-rich foods such as

salmon, sardines, and flax (omega-3 fatty acids reduce inflammation). Wearing a good, supportive bra can relieve some breast tenderness. In addition, you can try supplementing with 400 to 800 IU daily of natural vitamin E, which also has anti-inflammatory properties.

Contrary to popular myth, women with fibrocystic breasts do not have an increased risk of breast cancer. However, mammograms are harder to read when you have denser breasts, so it's important to do a monthly breast self-exam. If a lump feels different and is painless, hard, or irregularly shaped, you should check with your doctor. **SP**

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

Sleep to Stay Slim. A lack of shut-eye may greatly raise the risk of obesity for adults and children, according to a review of studies involving 28,000 children and 15,000 adults. British researchers concluded that sleeping less than five hours a night is linked with an almost twofold increase in obesity risk along with an increase in body mass index and waist circumference over time. One possible explanation, say researchers who presented their findings at a scientific meeting in July, is that hormonal changes caused by sleep deprivation may increase appetite.

Comment: A lack of quality sleep increases your susceptibility to illness and I'm not surprised that it can also alter appetite. A major reason why people can't sleep is chronic stress, which also adds to obesity risk.

Comparing Heart-Healthy Diets. Following a typical Mediterranean-style diet seemed to protect the heart more than a low-fat plan, say Spanish researchers. In the study, 772 older adults at high risk for cardiovascular disease spent three months on one of three diets, either a Mediterranean diet with olive oil as the prime source of fat or one emphasizing nuts, or a low-fat diet from the American Heart Association. Both Mediterranean diet groups had bigger improvements in blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and markers of inflammation compared to the low-fat eaters, possibly because they were getting more healthy unsaturated fats from nuts and oils. (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, July 4, 2006)

Comment: To prevent heart disease and optimize health, I've long recommended a Mediterranean diet (essentially an anti-inflammatory eating plan) that's rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and incorporates "good" fats from fish, olive oil, and nuts instead of a diet that cuts total fat intake.

Diabetes and Dementia Link. Two studies presented at the International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders added to the growing evidence that people with type 2 diabetes or high blood sugar levels have a greater risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Over nine years, Swedish researchers followed nearly 1,200 individuals aged 75 and older who didn't have diabetes or dementia when they joined the study. They found that borderline diabetes (now called prediabetes) was associated with a 70 percent higher risk of developing both dementia and Alzheimer's; if a person had both prediabetes and hypertension, the risk was even higher. A second study looking at some 23,000 diabetics aged 50 and older found that those with poor blood sugar control were more likely to develop dementia over an eight-year period.

Comment: Alzheimer's disease is now thought to begin with inflammation in the brain. High blood sugar levels encourage more glycation reactions in the body between sugar and proteins, producing compounds that encourage inflammation and hasten aging.

Move More, Live Longer. Seniors who regularly expend more energy in their daily activities—whether they're doing household chores, exercising, or just fidgeting—live longer than their less-active peers, a recent study shows. The study followed 302 healthy adults aged 70 to 82 for about six years, after first measuring how much energy the participants used over a two-week period. Those who were most active when the study began, regardless of whether they exercised, were 69 percent less likely to die than those who were most sedentary. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 12, 2006)

Comment: All activity is good—it doesn't have to be formal exercise. I hope these impressive findings encourage older people to look for ways to be more active: Take the stairs, care for young children, putter in your garden. Every little bit counts. **SP**

Get the Facts on Flax

Since the days of Hippocrates, flax has been used to ease gastrointestinal problems. Now researchers are finding that the seed's compounds show promise in the prevention and treatment of many conditions, including cancer and high cholesterol. I recommend eating 2 tablespoons of freshly ground flaxseed every day. In addition to its health benefits, flax adds a sweet, nutty flavor to foods.

Known for its high fiber content, flax's greatest value may come from its abundance of lignans, a class of phytoestrogens. These plant compounds with estrogen-like activity may protect against hormone-driven cancers and also act as antioxidants. In addition, the alpha-linolenic acid (LNA) found in flax also provides the body with much-needed omega-3 fatty acids. LNA is converted in the body to eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), the omega-3s found in oily fish like salmon (but because the conversion is inefficient, I also recommend eating fish or taking fish oil).

Recent human studies of flax support positive results from a decade of encouraging test-tube and animal findings. Here I'll discuss some health benefits of this ancient seed.

Gastrointestinal problems. Flax contains 3 grams of insoluble fiber in every 2 tablespoons, which helps promote good digestion and protects against common conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, and diverticulitis. Fiber-rich foods also reduce risks of colon and rectal cancers.

Menopausal symptoms. In a study of 25 menopausal women, consuming 40 grams (6 tablespoons) of flaxseed a day was shown to be as effective as taking a combination of estrogen and progesterone for improving mild menopausal symptoms (*Obstetrics & Gynecology*, September 2002). Scientists believe the lignans may regulate the use of estrogen when the body isn't producing enough, as is the case with menopause.

Prostate cancer. One small study of men with prostate cancer showed daily consumption of flaxseed combined with a low-fat diet slowed the growth of cancer between diagnosis and surgery (*Urology*, July 2001). Although another study suggested an association between LNA and an increased risk of advanced prostate cancer, I'm not convinced flax was the culprit. Researchers weren't able to pinpoint one food source of LNA as being responsible, and the LNA content in fatty foods like meat, creamy dressings, and mayonnaise may have contributed to the increased risk.

Breast cancer. In a small study of women with breast cancer, regular flax consumption slowed cancer cell proliferation and tumor growth (*Clinical Cancer Research*, May 15, 2005). Although it's not known how flax fights cancer, it has been

suggested that the lignans in flax may make cancer cells less aggressive. Flax may also be an important chemopreventive. "We just finished an epidemiological study involving thousands of subjects that showed exposure to lignans in adolescence is protective against breast cancer later in life," says Lilian Thompson, PhD, a leading flax researcher and professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Toronto.

High cholesterol. Two tablespoons of flax contains about 1.5 grams of soluble fiber, which is known to lower cholesterol. This may explain the results of a study in which women who added 2 tablespoons of ground flax to their daily diet for four weeks had a 9 percent drop in total cholesterol and an 18 percent drop in LDL cholesterol; HDL levels stayed the same (*Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, April 2002).

Diabetes. The soluble fiber in flax may also help people with diabetes normalize blood sugar. In rats, the antioxidants found in flax slowed the development of diabetes (*Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine*, July 2001).

The Practical Side of Flax

Despite my enthusiasm for flax, I recommend people avoid flax oil, which is available in liquid and capsules. When most flax oil is made, the beneficial lignans and fiber from flaxseed are eliminated. The oil also goes rancid quickly. Grinding your own flaxseed, which is sold at most natural food stores, is much less expensive; a 30-day supply costs about \$1. Grind a half-cup at a time in a coffee grinder or blender and refrigerate in an airtight opaque container for up to 30 days. (You'll know that the flax meal has spoiled when it smells like oil paint.) Sprinkle on cereals, salads, and cooked vegetables, or add to shakes and nut butters. Two tablespoons of ground flaxseed has about 4.5 grams of fiber, 3 grams of omega-3s as LNA, 3 grams of protein, 5 grams of fat, less than 6 grams of carbohydrates, and 80 calories. I still recommend adults consume oily fish two to three times a week or take 1 to 2 grams of fish oil each day to get enough preformed EPA and DHA. (Vegetarians can take DHA supplements derived from algae.)

Although not all products containing flaxseed will list whether it's ground or whole, when buying products look for flax meal as an ingredient, since flax must be ground for your body to absorb its nutrients. To bake and cook with flax, consult *The Flax Cookbook* by Elaine Magee (Marlowe & Company, 2002). In some recipes, you may want to use the more expensive golden flax for color, but there is no nutritional difference between it and brown flax.

Flax is not known to interact with drugs or supplements, but hypothetically the fiber may interfere with their absorption. If this concerns you, take your medications and supplements at least two hours before or after you eat flax. **SP**

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Omega-3s & the Mind

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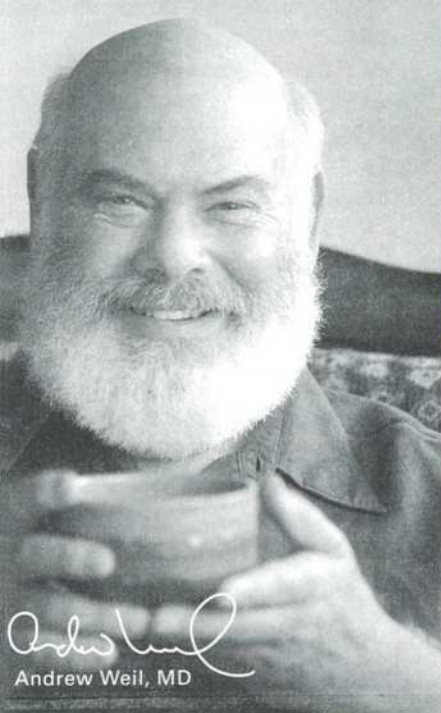
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OCTOBER 2006

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CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

ON MY MIND

Super Fruit?

Açaí (pronounced *ah-SAH-ee*) berry, harvested in the Brazilian rainforest, is today's hot fruit. Called "the new pomegranate," this deep purple fruit with a sour taste is popping up in pricey juices, powders, smoothies, and sorbets. Because açaí is rich in polyphenols and other antioxidants, it's been hailed by some as a superfood or "miracle berry."

Claims. Marketers claim açaí can do everything from lower cholesterol and encourage weight loss to boost immunity and fight cancer. Yet, I know of no good scientific evidence to back up the claims. A recent study did find that antioxidant compounds in açaí could destroy leukemia cells in test tubes. But whether açaí could help prevent or treat cancer in humans is unknown.

My advice. Save your money and spend it on familiar (and cheaper) berries or pomegranate juice instead. Berries have cancer-protective compounds, and pomegranate juice has shown promise in lab and animal tests for slowing the progression of prostate cancer, improving circulation, and helping osteoarthritis.

What's Wrong with Multitasking?

Like many busy people, I'm guilty of reading email while talking on the phone. These days multitasking feels like a necessity of modern life. But some people are recognizing its downsides and shifting to a more mindful, one-thing-at-a-time approach. Here are four problems with doing several things at once.

It rarely saves time. Most people don't realize how big a cost in lost efficiency there is from multitasking, explains University of Michigan psychologist David E. Meyer, PhD, who studied just that. He and his colleagues found that rather than accomplishing more, people slowed down considerably when multitasking. Research participants lost a significant amount of time shuttling between tasks of varying complexity and familiarity, adding as much as 40 percent to completion time compared to finishing one job and beginning another. Meyer says it takes time for the brain to shift gears and warm up to a new task.

Efficiency and productivity decrease. Switching among tasks creates stress and divides your attention. Plus, it's harder to remember where you left off and requires more thinking. Try this: First, time yourself when counting from one to 10. Next, say the alphabet from *a* through *j* and time that. Add up the time both tasks took. Now combine these tasks by first saying a number and then a letter in sequence, alternating until you reach 10 and the letter *j*. Notice the time difference. With practice, the brain can become somewhat more efficient at handling multiple tasks, but usually performance suffers compared with doing each task individually.

The brain is not designed to multitask. Computers, where the term "multitasking" originated, seem to process information simultaneously, but the brain appears to do it sequentially. What's more, the brain can't double its processing capacity when you multitask. Scientists used imaging scans to measure brain activity of people asked to mentally rotate three-dimensional shapes

while listening to sentences read aloud (tasks involving different parts of the brain). Brain activity in each region dropped by one-third when multitasking compared to attending to each task with single-minded focus. The prefrontal cortex behind your forehead is most involved in multitasking; it assesses, prioritizes, and sequences tasks. This area is one of the last to fully mature and might have trouble filtering out distractions with aging. It's also a region greatly affected by the chronic stress of habitual multitasking.

Your ability to juggle tasks depends on the skills involved. Multitasking is easiest to do when at least one of the chores is automatic, such as walking while conversing or folding laundry while listening to music. The activities aren't similar and one is routine, so both don't compete for your physical and mental resources. But when attempting complicated tasks simultaneously, people do neither one as well as they would each alone. When a task is important, don't multitask.

To work more productively, Meyer recommends taking brief meditation breaks between difficult tasks. "By deep breathing or not thinking about anything, which is directed meditation, you can let the brain go into neutral." He also suggests intelligent time management, like scheduling difficult tasks during times when you can concentrate and saving routine duties for when interruptions might occur.

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In the last few years, I've made an effort to learn more about alternative fuels. And this past spring I started producing biodiesel, a clean-burning alternative fuel made from vegetable oils, on my ranch in Arizona with my neighbor André Fasciola. He collects waste vegetable oil from the University of Arizona Student Union and local restaurants and then processes it to yield methyl esters of fatty acids (the chemical name for biodiesel) and glycerin, a nontoxic byproduct that can be used to make soap and other products. We do this in a special processing unit (BioPro 190) over 48 hours. We use 100 percent biodiesel in our cars for a mere 78 cents per gallon and we hope to inspire others to use it as well.

Research suggests that using biodiesel instead of regular petrodiesel reduces particulate matter from exhaust fumes (an emission linked to asthma and other respiratory diseases) by 47 percent and carbon monoxide (a poisonous gas) by 48 percent. Using biodiesel also releases fewer cancer-causing compounds into the environment, and cuts down on ozone and smog.

Biodiesel can be used as a pure fuel or blended with petrodiesel to run almost any diesel engine. (This isn't surprising since Rudolf Diesel built the diesel engine to run on peanut oil.) It can also be blended into heating oil. The federal government and many states offer tax incentives to commercial and public entities that use alternative energy. I support these programs and hope to see more options available for consumers. Many countries are far ahead of us in the production and distribution of alternative fuels. In Germany, one in 10 gas stations offers biodiesel. To learn more about this fuel, visit biodiesel.org.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine, professor of public health, and clinical professor of medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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When Is the Best Time to Exercise?

Exercise is good for you any time of day, but science has found certain advantages and disadvantages to working out at different times. Consider these factors before choosing when to work out, and experiment to see how different times affect you.

Morning. An early workout can start your day right by boosting your energy and releasing endorphins (natural mood boosters). There's also some evidence that early-bird exercisers tend to make fitness a habit and stick with it. Plus, morning exercise may help you sleep better at night: In a study of postmenopausal women with sleep problems, morning exercisers who worked out at least 3.5 hours a week had less trouble falling asleep than evening exercisers (*Sleep*, November 1, 2003). Researchers speculate that morning exercise affects hormone levels in ways that promote better sleep.

Yet, an AM workout may mean getting out of bed earlier, a potential obstacle. Plus, morning exercisers may be more prone to injury: Your body temperature is at its lowest, leaving your muscles less flexible. To sidestep this, move in slow motion for 10 minutes until your muscles are warmed up.

Afternoon. My favorite time to exercise is usually 3 or 4 p.m. Recent research suggests a late-afternoon workout may be the most productive because that's when your body temperature is highest. Your muscles are more flexible and less prone to injury, your lung performance is at its best, and you have the greatest strength.

If you like to exercise in the early afternoon, such as during your lunch break, I suggest doing so *before* you eat if you're trying to lose weight. Since carbohydrates turn into blood sugar, consuming carbohydrate-rich foods before a workout will cause the body to use that sugar as fuel. This prevents the burning of fat calories and keeps fat stores intact. If you want to shed pounds, work out on an empty stomach.

Evening. After a long day, an evening workout helps to relieve stress. But depending on the timing, exercise can be stimulating and interfere with sleep. This is less of a problem if you avoid working out within one to three hours before heading to bed; that's about how long it usually takes for your body temperature to decrease after vigorous physical activity. 

Five Foods to Help Prevent Breast Cancer

One of the best defenses against breast cancer may well be diet. A growing and impressive body of research reveals that what you eat and drink can help protect you from the disease. Below is a list of five foods that every woman should include in her regular diet—the sooner, the better. All of them are part of the anti-inflammatory diet I recommend for optimum health.

Soy. Breast cancer is estrogen driven and eating soy appears to ward off breast cancer by blocking estrogen receptors. Whole soy foods, like edamame, tofu, tempeh, and soy milk, contain weak plant estrogens that displace estradiol, your body's more potent form of the hormone. Soy's benefits get murkier when you consider that only about one-third of Americans can metabolize it into the form associated with greater risk reduction. And soy may be more protective when consumed before puberty, while breast tissue is forming.

Bottom line? Soy's potential benefits are too great to pass up—especially if you start eating it early in life (one study says protection begins *in utero*). I believe population studies support the consumption of soy even if you have or have had breast cancer, but this topic remains controversial, especially if your cancer is estrogen positive and you're on tamoxifen. In this case, I suggest you consult your oncologist.

Fruits and vegetables. Overwhelming evidence shows that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables helps prevent most types of cancer. Scientists suggest the protection may come from plant chemicals called polyphenols and carotenoids found in many fruits and vegetables. These compounds act as antioxidants and prevent damage to DNA that can trigger cancer growth. In fact, a recent study shows that breast cancer patients with the highest fruit and vegetable intake (and the highest blood levels of carotenoids) had a 43 percent lower risk of breast cancer recurrence compared to women with the lowest produce intake and the lowest carotenoid levels (*Journal of Clinical Oncology*, September 2005).

I recommend that women eat at least nine daily servings of a variety of brightly colored fruits and vegetables. I also advise making one of those servings a cruciferous vegetable like broccoli, cauliflower, or cabbage; these not only provide antioxidant protection, but also help your body metabolize estrogen into a form associated with lower breast cancer risk, called 2-hydroxyestrone. Choose organic varieties when you can, especially for heavily treated produce.

Green tea. It's difficult to beat the antioxidant power of green tea. Although it comes from the same plant as black tea, the process of making green tea retains far more of the polyphenols that give the beverage its antioxidant potency. Most studies of green tea's effect on breast cancer have been in test tubes. However, a recent analysis of epidemiological data found that drinking five cups of green tea a day reduces breast cancer risk by 22 percent (*Carcinogenesis*, July 2006). I recommend everyone drink at least one cup a day.

Fish. Eating oily fish helps protect against breast cancer in two specific ways, says my colleague Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the Program in Integrative Medicine.

Foods to Limit or Avoid

When it comes to breast cancer prevention, what you don't eat and drink matters as much as what you do.

Sugar. Refined foods containing sugar indirectly increase levels of insulin-like growth factor-1, which stimulates the growth of breast cancer cells.

Red meat. Studies show that women who eat the most animal fat—which is rich in saturated fat—are more likely to develop breast cancer. Commercially raised beef also contains estrogen residues. If you eat red meat, choose organic, which at least has no added hormones (the same goes for all dairy products).

Charred meats. Over-grilling transforms compounds in meat, poultry, and fish into cancer-causing chemicals called heterocyclic amines.

Partially hydrogenated oils. These oils, used to extend the shelf life of many processed foods, contain trans fats, which have been linked in studies to an increased risk of breast cancer.

Alcohol. Consuming alcohol can increase levels of estrogen in the blood. But because moderate intake of alcohol also protects against heart disease, you have to weigh your risks. If you have breast cancer, eliminating alcohol makes sense. If you do drink, limit your intake to one drink a day, which a recent study suggests is all you need for cardiovascular benefits.

First, it supplies plenty of omega-3 fatty acids, which help to metabolize the hormone into the safer 2-hydroxyestrone form. Second, oily fish contain vitamin D, which has been linked to a lower risk of breast cancer and many other malignancies (other vitamin D sources include fortified milk and soy milk, vitamin supplements, egg yolks, and liver).

Aim for two to three servings of oily fish a week, and choose Alaskan sockeye salmon, sardines, and black cod to avoid the mercury and PCBs found in other species. If you don't eat seafood, supplement with 1 to 2 grams of fish oil a day. Fish oil might not offer all the benefits of eating fish, but supplies a convenient, contaminant-free source of omega-3s.

Flaxseed. Flax also contains omega-3s that aid in blocking estrogen from binding to receptors and help break down estradiol into a safer form. Plant chemicals in flaxseed called lignans also seem to play a role in thwarting cancer. In one study, they were linked to slowed breast tumor growth, and there's some evidence that lignans, and flax's high-fiber content, can help to lower estrogen levels.

I suggest adding fresh ground flax seeds to your diet rather than supplementing with flax oil; the oil typically lacks the beneficial lignans and fiber. Sprinkle two tablespoons of ground seeds a day in breakfast shakes or on cereals, salads, or cooked vegetables. 

How Omega-3s Promote Mental Health

Most people eat too few foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fish, walnuts, and flax seeds, and too many processed foods with excessive amounts of omega-6 fatty acids, including soy, corn, palm, and cottonseed oils. A typical Western diet now contains 20 to 30 times as much omega-6s as omega-3 fats, while a century ago people consumed about equal amounts. This fatty-acid imbalance in the diet may have ill effects on mental health. For instance, low levels of omega-3s have been linked to depression and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and the prevalence of those conditions has risen as omega-3 content in the diet has decreased. As scientists search for an explanation, more evidence suggests omega-3s are essential to normal brain development and function.

Joseph Hibbeln, MD, senior clinical investigator at the Laboratory of Membrane Biochemistry and Biophysics at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, has studied the connection between fish consumption and mental health worldwide. He found that those countries with the highest fish consumption have the lowest rates of depression, bipolar disorder, homicide, and suicide. One explanation may be the omega-3s found in some fish. The Japanese, for example, have the lowest rate of major depression in the developed world and eat about 145 pounds of fish annually, while major depression rates in the United States, where people eat about 42 pounds a year, are roughly 30 times higher.

Many other studies reinforce the mental health benefits of omega-3 fats. A 1999 study led by Andrew Stoll, MD, author of *The Omega-3 Connection*, tested the effects of omega-3 supplements on 30 patients with bipolar disorder (manic depression). After just four months, people given high doses of fish oil in addition to taking their usual medication had significantly longer breaks between depressive episodes than those taking a placebo. People with ADHD also seem to have lower blood levels of healthy omega-3 fats. And research suggests that children with autism who take fish oil have better concentration, less aggression, and fewer sleep disturbances.

Doctors are also reporting positive results. "I recommend my patients with ADHD and autism supplement with fish oil to get more omega-3s," says Tucson-based integrative pediatrician Sandy Newmark, MD. "In autism, you often see an improvement in language development and parents report improvement in social skills."

How Fatty Acids Affect the Brain

Your body cannot make omega-3 fats, so it relies on diet as its source. For this reason, an essential fatty-acid imbalance can start before you're born. Mothers transfer to their fetuses the omega-3 fat docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to support brain development. Research suggests the amount of omega-3s in a pregnant woman's body may influence a child's social skills, intelligence, and motor abilities. Using data from a 15-year study of 14,000 parents and children, Dr. Hibbeln and colleagues found that children born to women who consumed

the least amount of omega-3s during their pregnancies had verbal IQs six points lower than average, and children with the best motor skills at age 3 were the ones whose mothers had the highest intakes. This research was presented at a scientific meeting in January. Another study of 117 children with developmental coordination disorder, a condition involving deficits in motor function and difficulties in learning and behavior, found that those given omega-3 supplements for three months experienced significant improvements in reading, spelling, and behavior compared to the placebo group (*Pediatrics*, May 2005). Since 2000, many US infant formulas contain omega-3s, a practice begun years earlier in Europe.

Pregnancy itself can lower a woman's blood levels of omega-3s and shortfalls may contribute to postpartum depression. Without sufficient intake to support a mother and her fetus, women become depleted of DHA. After analyzing data from 23 countries, Dr. Hibbeln concluded that higher concentrations of DHA in mothers' milk and greater seafood consumption were associated with lower rates of postpartum depression (*Journal of Affective Disorders*, May 2002). And an eight-week study here at the University of Arizona of 16 women with postpartum depression who supplemented daily with .5 to 2.8 grams of fish oil found that even the low doses significantly improved the women's depressive symptoms (*Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, January 2006).

DHA is the main omega-3 in the brain, but eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), a heart-healthy omega-3 fat, also plays a role in brain function. An omega-3 deficiency can decrease blood flow throughout the body and impair the maturation of capillaries, which in turn can damage the brain, but there are numerous mechanisms by which a fatty-acid imbalance may cause or worsen mental health problems.

One of the most critical mechanisms, says Dr. Hibbeln, is the effect on brain cell membranes, which allow the chemical messages to pass among cells. Researchers have found greater membrane fluidity, which promotes greater communication between cells, in patients with bipolar disorder who received omega-3 supplements (*American Journal of Psychiatry*, October 2004). It's also possible that brain cells use omega-6 fats when they cannot get omega-3s, causing an inflammatory response and less membrane fluidity. In fact, many mood disorders appear to be linked to inflammation: Children with autism have inflammation in their brains, and depression has been linked with inflammation. Omega-3s have been shown to help reduce this inflammation.

Omega-3 deficiency has also been found to result in an excessive release of proteins in the brain that may in turn prohibit neurotransmitter release. Studies show that depleted levels of omega-3s affect serotonin levels, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood. In an animal study, researchers found that those given omega-3-rich feed had twice as much serotonin in the brain's frontal cortex as those on standard feed (*Pediatric Research*, July 2000). Deficits in serotonin have also been linked to an increased risk of depressive symptoms and autism (many antidepressant drugs boost serotonin levels).

Schizophrenia, which causes people to have trouble distinguishing what's real from what's imaginary, has been linked to an imbalance of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which affects learning and motivation. It's thought that levels of dopamine may be too high or low in parts of the brain. Animal studies show that fish oil supplementation can influence brain dopamine levels. Some antipsychotic drugs appear to treat schizophrenia by blocking dopamine receptors.

How to Choose Omega-3s

To get these essential fats from food, there may not be much difference in omega-3 content between brands of walnuts, but fish is more complicated. Choose fatty fish, like salmon, and opt for wild rather than farm-raised varieties. A study by the US Department of Agriculture found that wild salmon had 33 percent more omega-3s than farm-raised. Canned sockeye salmon (it's all wild) and sardines are good choices.

If you have a mental health condition, you also will want to take a fish oil supplement. Instead of swallowing lots of

capsules, I prefer the liquid form (which may be flavored lemon or orange) because I find it easier to use and more economical, especially for higher doses. In addition to an omega-3-rich diet, a good starting dose is 1 to 2 grams of fish oil daily with a ratio of EPA to DHA of 3 or 4 to 1. Working with your psychiatrist, who may also adjust your medications, you may gradually increase this dose. For children, Dr. Newmark recommends 15 mg of fish oil per pound of body weight. It can be taken by the spoonful or added to salads or shakes. Choose brands that can back up claims to be contaminant-free, such as Nordic Naturals and the Weil brand.

Fish oil appears safe to take with other mood-boosting supplements and with antidepressant and antipsychotic medications. Because fish oil may affect blood clotting, it may be best to avoid it if you're taking anticoagulant drugs, have had a hemorrhagic stroke, or are anticipating surgery. High doses of fish oil can cause belching and flatulence; you may be able to avoid these side effects by taking smaller doses throughout the day with food, by taking capsules directly from the freezer, or by using krill oil. 

Sweetening the Path to Obesity

It amazes me how ubiquitous high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) has become in food products today. Most people know this ingredient can be found in sodas, cookies, jams, fruit beverages, and candy. But it can also be lurking in products you might not consider sweet, such as bread, beer, yogurt, ketchup, and baby food. I spoke with David Ludwig, MD, PhD, director of the obesity program at Children's Hospital in Boston, about HFCS, and he agrees with me that you should be wary of this sweetener.

The sweetener. HFCS is a liquid sweetener made by treating starch extracted from corn with enzymes, which convert it to an approximately equal mixture of two sugars, fructose and glucose. (Fructose is much sweeter than glucose but is not as readily metabolized by the body.) By reading food labels, you'll identify which items have HFCS on the ingredients list. "High-fructose corn syrup is similar to table sugar in its ratio of fructose to glucose, which is about half and half," says Dr. Ludwig. "Yet, the name is misleading; people might think it's high in fructose, but really it's just higher in relation to regular

corn syrup, which has no fructose at all." (Regular corn syrup is extracted from cornstarch but is not treated with as many enzymes; it contains about 96 percent glucose and no fructose.) The food industry likes HFCS because it's about 20 percent cheaper than sugar, due to government subsidies on corn and tariffs on sugar, and it acts as a stabilizer and preservative in food. HFCS has about the same amount of calories as sugar.

Current research. Many recent studies have reported the sweetener's negative effects, but most of them have looked at fructose rather than HFCS. Elevated triglyceride levels, blood fats that cause heart disease, and insulin resistance, which may lead to type 2 diabetes, have been linked to too much fructose in the diet, and both are often associated with weight gain. (The levels of fructose found naturally in fruit and honey are too low to have these ill effects.) More research needs to be done using HFCS itself and comparing the effects of the sweetener to everyday table sugar.

I don't think it's a coincidence that obesity rates have risen dramatically since the introduction of HFCS

into mainstream products, which began in the 1970s, if only because the increased use of sugars in general has contributed to increased caloric intake. Alarming, consumption of HFCS has risen by more than 1,000 percent since 1970. Of course, the food industry says there isn't enough evidence to show that HFCS is bad for consumers, although I think it would be hard to find any nutrition expert who would agree that these excess calories in the diet are beneficial to people, even if there isn't yet concrete evidence of harmful effects.

My advice. I always recommend avoiding any unnatural, chemically enhanced products, and I consider HFCS a marker of low-quality foods, which I avoid. I also try to avoid foods with any added sugar. Although the health effects of HFCS are not known, it's clear that sugar consumption on the whole is at an all-time high. Dr. Ludwig doesn't distinguish between sugar and HFCS when talking to parents of obese children—he stresses the need for limiting the consumption of all added sugars, especially the empty calories that are found in soda and candy. I think that's good advice for adults as well. 

Ask Dr. Weil Botox for Migraines; Powdered Fiber; and More

I take licorice as part of a combination of supplements to ease osteoarthritis pain, but I read it's not recommended for long-term use. Is it dangerous?

I think there are better supplements than licorice for osteoarthritis (OA) pain. The concern with using licorice long term is that some products contain glycyrrhizin, a compound that has both beneficial and harmful effects. From your question, it's not clear whether you're taking licorice as part of a combination herb product for OA or taking it as an isolated supplement. (Licorice is often added as a sweetening agent to hide the bitterness of many herbal blends.)

While licorice has anti-inflammatory properties, making it a valuable remedy for some gastrointestinal and respiratory problems, I'm not aware of any good scientific evidence suggesting its effectiveness for OA pain. Glycyrrhizin can cause water and sodium retention in some people, and possibly increase blood pressure. If used at daily dosages that provide less than 100 mg of glycyrrhizin, it's unlikely to cause harmful side effects. Even so, I wouldn't take whole licorice for more than six weeks without consulting your physician, who can monitor your blood pressure. Anyone whose blood pressure is already high should avoid the herb, as should people with glaucoma or diabetes, those with heart, liver, or kidney problems, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. (A form that lacks glycyrrhizin, known as deglycyrrhizinized licorice or DGL, is used for GERD and other upper GI problems. It's safe for extended use.)

If you want to experiment with anti-inflammatory herbs for OA, I recommend Zylamend from New Chapter (its main ingredients are ginger and turmeric, and it contains no licorice). For more integrative treatment advice, see *Self Healing's* special report on osteoarthritis, which can be purchased by visiting drweilselfhealing.com or calling (888) 337-9345.

In the "How Healthy Is Your Cookware?" article in the August issue, you didn't address the safety of silicone and stone cookware. What are your thoughts?

I'm unaware of safety issues or health concerns about cookware made of silicone or stone (commonly soapstone). Food-grade silicone—not the same as the gel used in breast implants—is found in hundreds of kitchen items from baking sheets and muffin tins to spatulas and ice cube trays. Like Teflon, silicone cookware has a nonstick surface. But this lightweight, flexible material shouldn't react with or leach into foods, or produce any toxic vapors. The silicone rubber it's made from is not a toxic substance, plus it's easy to clean, distributes heat evenly, and is safe to use at temperatures up to 428 °F (at higher temperatures it might melt). Be careful when removing hot foods from silicone surfaces, because they slip and slide more easily than on other materials.

Soapstone cookware does an excellent job of retaining heat and distributing it evenly. Usually made from quarried granite or marble, it's so named because it often contains talc,

which gives its surface a slippery feel like soap. It's attractive, can be used both to cook in and serve from, and generally lasts a long time. One drawback: Soapstone might crack if exposed to a direct flame or wide temperature swings, so use it for low-heat cooking only or gradually preheat it.

Are clear-mixing fiber supplements such as Fibersure or Benefiber safe and effective to use?

I usually recommend people consume fiber from food, such as beans, berries, and whole grains, and don't have much experience with these clear fiber supplements. So I asked Cyndi Thomson, PhD, a dietitian who teaches nutrition at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine. "They are safe and effective," says Thomson, "although I find they don't supply nearly as much fiber as, say, beans, lentils, seeds, or even high-fiber cereal, especially when you look at the cost per gram of fiber provided." A cup of canned red kidney beans, for example, has 16 grams of dietary fiber compared to clear mixing supplements that have about 4 grams per teaspoon and the beans cost half as much. As far as powdered fiber goes, it's a big step up from the old gritty mixes; it dissolves quickly, is virtually tasteless, and can be added in cooking and baking. However, Thomson warns that some products add sugar to improve taste.

I've started taking Botox for migraines and it has helped tremendously, but I'm concerned about the long-term effects. What's your opinion?

In general, I recommend migraine sufferers try herbal remedies and other more natural approaches to prevent and treat their headaches. The safety of Botox (botulinum toxin A) may depend on how often you get these injections into your forehead muscles. First approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the late 1980s to treat eye-muscle problems, Botox is not approved to treat migraines or other headaches, but it's been used "off-label" for this purpose. It's true that small studies have shown it to be effective in decreasing migraine frequency and intensity and headache-related disability, possibly by suppressing the muscle contractions that trigger headaches and by interrupting the transmission of pain signals to the brain. Even so, I would avoid using Botox: Its long-term effects are still unknown, and there is some evidence it can cause muscle atrophy (although this was not reported as a side effect in the migraine studies).

To reduce the frequency of migraines, I suggest you eliminate caffeine and other common dietary triggers, such as chocolate, wine, processed meats, and strong cheeses, and experiment with the herb butterbur (use Petadolex brand in doses of 100 to 150 mg daily) or feverfew (100 to 150 mg daily of an extract standardized to contain at least 0.2 percent parthenolides). Biofeedback—a mind-body method used to help stop migraines at the start of an attack—has also proven effective in some migraine sufferers.

Do you recommend electromagnetic filters for computers and other electric appliances?

I don't. While makers of radiation shields in the form of necklaces, computer screen guards, cell phone chips, and even mattress shields claim these devices reduce electromagnetic fields (EMFs), there is still no scientific evidence that they will reduce EMF emissions. Appliances such as televisions, radios, microwave ovens, cell phones, hair dryers, electric blankets, and heating pads can all generate EMFs.

Some research suggests a link between EMF exposure and certain types of cancer, but the evidence is mixed. I still think it's a good idea to reduce your exposure to EMFs when possible. One strategy is to keep a safe distance between you

and the source; just an arm's length away will greatly reduce exposure. EMFs are stronger near the source and weaken rapidly the farther you move away from it. Avoid electric blankets or heating pads; they generate strong EMFs in close contact with your body. Keep plug-in clock radios off your nightstand and away from your head.

Also, limit the time of exposure. Use curling irons, hair dryers, and electric razors only briefly. With cell phones, I suggest keeping conversations short and using a hands-free headset to move the phone away from your body. For more on EMFs, go to <http://niehs.nih.gov/emfrapid/booklet>. 

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing,
42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Health in the News

How Meditation Eases Pain. Several studies have found meditation can ease chronic pain, and new research suggests it reduces the brain's response to it. Researchers studied 24 healthy adults: Half had practiced Transcendental Meditation (TM) for an average of 31 years, and half had only attended a lecture on the technique. All were asked to briefly dip two fingers in hot water while receiving brain scans. The long-time meditators showed 40 to 50 percent less activity in certain brain regions in response to pain than the control group. When the novice meditators then practiced TM for five months, new brain scans showed 40 to 50 percent less activity in response to pain, compared to earlier scans. (*NeuroReport*, August 21, 2006)

Comment: While this study involved TM, I wouldn't be surprised if other forms of meditation offered similar benefits. New brain imaging technology has made it possible to see how meditation can change brain function.

Illusions of Portion Size. Your plates, bowls, forks, and spoons may be the keys to controlling how much you eat. Researchers gave 85 nutrition experts either a 17-ounce or 34-ounce bowl with a 2-ounce or 3-ounce spoon and had participants serve themselves ice cream. Afterwards, their ice cream serving was weighed while they filled out a survey asking how much ice cream they thought they had scooped. People who received the larger bowls unknowingly served themselves 31 percent more dessert than those given smaller bowls, and servings increased some 14 percent when using a larger spoon. (*American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, September 2006)

Comment: Portion control is critical to losing and maintaining weight and yet even experts aren't good at estimating serving sizes. People who want to lose weight should try using smaller bowls and spoons.

Diet Treats Diabetes. More than 40 percent of people with type 2 diabetes who followed a low-fat vegan diet, consisting of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, for roughly six months reduced their need for medications to manage the disease, compared with 26 percent of those following a diet recommended by the American Diabetes Association (ADA). Unlike a vegan diet, the ADA plan limits calories and carbohydrates, and focuses on portion sizes. Both groups also lost weight and decreased cholesterol and blood sugar levels, although improvements were greatest on the vegan diet. (*Diabetes Care*, August 2006)

Comment: I believe the ADA diet is out of date, so I'm not surprised that participants following it didn't do better. Still, I don't believe a vegan diet is necessary to manage diabetes; I would like to see results from a mostly plant-based diet with a low glycemic load and healthy fats.

Exercise Trims Belly Fat. Cutting calories and being physically active is more effective at shrinking fat cells around your waistline than diet alone, researchers conclude. In a recent study, 45 obese middle-aged women were randomly assigned to one of three weight-loss groups for about five months: one cut their caloric intake, another group dieted and walked at low intensity on a treadmill for 50 minutes three times a week, and a third group dieted and treadmill walked at a higher intensity for 30 minutes three times weekly. All groups achieved a deficit of 2,800 calories a week and lowered their body weight and percent body fat to a similar extent. But both the exercise groups decreased the size of abdominal fat cells by approximately 18 percent, while the diet alone group didn't change. (*International Journal of Obesity*, August 2006)

Comment: Dietary change plus increased physical activity is the way to achieve lasting weight loss. And this combination has the additional health benefit of reducing abdominal fat, a physical trait associated with an increased risk of heart disease and diabetes. 

7 Myths about Hypnosis

I often refer patients to hypnotherapists because I've seen this mind-body approach produce excellent results for many conditions, from eczema and irritable bowel syndrome to back pain and panic attacks. Practitioners of clinical hypnosis encourage patients to enter trance, a state of focused attention and heightened suggestibility, to promote physical or mental health. However, misconceptions about hypnotherapy may discourage people from learning how to use this valuable tool to heal. I'll dispel some myths, with help from Carol Ginandes, PhD, a health psychologist at Harvard Medical School, and Steve Gurgevich, PhD, who directs the Mind-Body Clinic at our Program in Integrative Medicine and specializes in clinical hypnosis.

1 You lose control or surrender your will. Perhaps you have seen TV shows in which a stage hypnotist gets someone to quack like a duck or sing like Elvis, or movies in which hypnotized people go into a zombie-like state and are made to do things against their will. In reality, hypnotherapists simply arrange circumstances to allow patients to move into their own natural states of focused concentration, similar to daydreaming, watching a movie, or getting absorbed in a good book. The person in a hypnotic trance is always in control—just as you're free to keep reading or close your book at any time—and you won't do anything that's contrary to your values or morals. While a hypnotherapist serves as a guide or teacher, all hypnosis is ultimately self-hypnosis.

2 You lose consciousness and have amnesia. While a small number of people who go into a very deep hypnotic state may experience amnesia, most people remember everything that occurred in hypnosis. Even though the word *hypnosis* derives from the Greek work for "sleep," you are not asleep in trance. Also, it's unlikely that a hypnotherapist will have you stare at a swinging pocket watch to enter trance. Instead, you might be asked to look at a small, stationary object—like a colored thumbtack on a blank wall—or to listen to the hypnotherapist's voice as you receive instructions to become more and more relaxed and focus your attention.

3 Hypnosis is a parlor trick. Another myth is that people are just play-acting to please the hypnotist. While this may be true of stage hypnosis meant for entertainment, this is not the case for medical hypnosis. Researchers have demonstrated that the benefits of hypnosis aren't merely subjective (such as feeling less pain). Studies by Ginandes and her colleagues have found that hypnosis can accelerate the healing of bone fractures and surgical wounds. Meanwhile, brain-imaging research is shedding light on how hypnosis may work to

reduce pain. In one study, the therapy seemed to block pain signals in the body from getting to the parts of the brain that perceive pain (*Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine*, November–December 2004).

4 Hypnosis is an instant cure-all. While hypnosis can work quickly, don't expect a single session to eliminate a long-standing problem instantly. In the case of someone who wants to quit smoking, for example, Ginandes might help the client address underlying psychological issues impeding smoking cessation as well as suggest craving cigarettes less and less over a period of time. Such suggestions can settle deeply in the unconscious mind, she says, like seeds planted beneath the soil rather than scattered over the top. But these seeds need time to grow: A typical course of hypnotherapy may require several sessions (lasting 45 minutes to an hour each), but once you've learned to access the trance state on your own, you can start practicing self-hypnosis for maximum physical and mental health benefits.

5 Only certain people can be hypnotized. According to some research, around 15 percent of people can be hypnotized very easily, another 15 percent show considerable resistance, and the majority, or 70 percent, fall somewhere in between. But there's also evidence that "low-hypnotizable" people who learn more about hypnosis can become "high-hypnotizable." Plus, Ginandes suggests that people respond differently to different hypnotic techniques, so a hypnotherapist may have you try more than one method of entering a trance to see what works best for you.

6 Anyone who can be hypnotized is weak-minded or gullible. The truth seems to be just the opposite, according to Gurgevich: The higher a person's intelligence, the greater the likelihood of being hypnotized. In contrast, individuals with serious cognitive deficits may be unable to concentrate well enough to follow instructions for entering a trance.

7 You may get "stuck" in trance. At the end of a session, the hypnotherapist will offer suggestions to come out of trance, but you can return to your normal state of consciousness any time you wish. If you happen to drift off to sleep, you'll simply wake up when you're ready. 

Here are some useful resources for hypnotherapy:

- *Heal Yourself with Medical Hypnosis.* Steve Gurgevich and I collaborated on this 2-CD set. You can order it by visiting drweilselfhealing.com or calling (888) 337-9345.
- For hypnosis recordings on a range of physical and emotional health concerns, visit healingwithhypnosis.com (Steve Gurgevich's website) or hypnosisnetwork.com (one new release is *Smooth Surgery, Rapid Recovery* by Carol Ginandes).
- To locate a licensed clinician who practices hypnosis in your area, visit asch.net.

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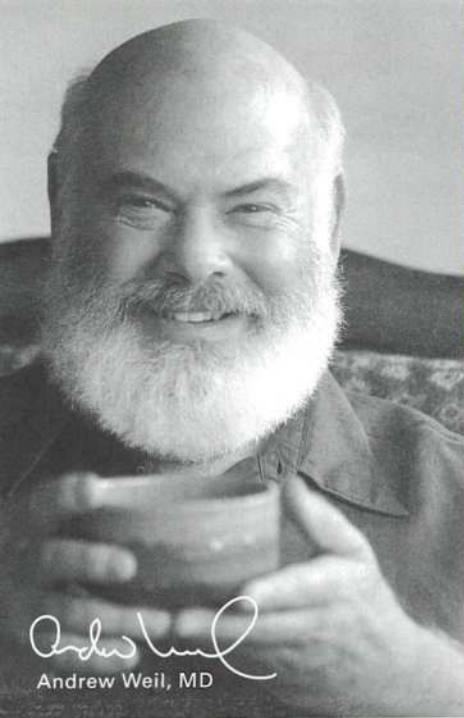
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ON MY MIND

Shoulder Relief

After a long drive or a day at your computer, your shoulders may feel stiff and achy. To ease them, I suggest asking a loved one to massage your trapezii, the large triangular muscles on the back of the shoulders where stress is often stored. Here's a soothing two-person technique to release tension on the lower neck and shoulders, one of the body's weak points. It's adapted from the book *Back Together: Hands-On Healing for Couples* by osteopathic physician Andrew Kirschner (Running Press, 2005).

How-to: Have a loved one place her hands on your shoulders, with thumbs on the back and fingers on the front. She should use her thumbs to locate the thick "belly" of the trapezius muscle, just below where your neck meets your shoulders. You may guide her to these two spots, left and right, which may feel tender. Have her apply gentle, slowly increasing pressure in a small circular pattern, changing directions periodically, until the points and pain "dissolve" beneath her thumbs. Afterward, switch places and return the favor. 

Dr. Andrew Weil's

NOVEMBER 2006

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

How Friendship Keeps You Healthy

During the holidays and throughout the year, spending time with good friends is one of the most powerful ways to enhance your health. Friends provide a sense of connection that can lower your stress levels and strengthen your immune system, which makes friendship essential to staying physically and emotionally healthy.

Unfortunately, many people are missing out on these valuable connections. A recent study of nearly 1,500 people suggests that Americans feel much more isolated today than two decades ago. By comparing survey results with data from 1985, the researchers found that participants' average number of confidants had dropped by nearly a third (*American Sociological Review*, June 2006).

This sense of isolation, which I call "disconnection syndrome," first causes illness on a spiritual level, then depletes mental and emotional health, and ultimately affects you physically. Feeling connected, on the other hand, can protect against a host of illnesses. Here are four ways that social connections can promote longevity, along with some of my suggestions for cultivating lifelong, health-giving relationships.

Stress relief. Just like practicing yoga or getting a good massage, maintaining social connections can ease the stress of everyday living. Friends help you unwind when you're feeling tense; they can also shift your focus so you don't dwell on stressful situations and make yourself feel worse. Denying yourself this reliable form of stress relief could affect your health: In a study of 240 middle-aged people, those who identified themselves as lonely had higher levels of stress hormones known to suppress the immune system (*Psychoneuroendocrinology*, May 23, 2003).

Stronger immunity. Keeping your stress hormones in check isn't the only way connection can be a hedge against illness. Last year, researchers discovered that older women who were socially active had lower levels of interleukin-6, a substance linked to chronic

inflammation that is found at high levels in people with Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, and cancer (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, December 20, 2005).

I find that connecting with friends and family can help everyone ward off minor, short-term sickness as well—a good reason to go out and get social instead of holing up at home during cold and flu season.

Coping and healing. Since social connections help reduce stress and boost immunity, it makes sense that people with chronic illness tend to fare better with a strong support system. In a study of 227 women with breast cancer, attending regular social support sessions helped soothe anxiety and even led to an increase in the women's levels of T cells, one of the body's top defenses against disease (*Journal of Clinical Oncology*, September 1, 2004). An earlier study of nearly 900 heart attack patients found that those who were depressed and lacking in social support had higher death rates than other study participants (*Circulation*, April 25, 2000).

Getting connected. There are many ways to connect with other people on a regular basis. You can do volunteer work, join a social group, or sign up for an adult education course. I recommend making room in your schedule each week to meet up with others, even when you feel too busy to take the time. It should be a top priority for achieving mind-body wellness. 

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The week of Thanksgiving is traditionally the busiest time for air travel, and a new study suggests it's also prime time for flu transmission. After looking at data on nine flu seasons between 1996 and 2005, researchers discovered that the decline in US air travel following the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks delayed the onset of that year's flu outbreak and slowed its spread around the country. They concluded that the more domestic airline passengers there are during November, the faster the flu moves across the nation. The illness can spread between passengers in crowded quarters or when contagious people reach communities not yet hit by flu. The study also found that the more international travelers flying into the United States during September, the earlier the flu season begins, indicating that new flu strains are introduced from abroad before flu season typically starts in October or November (*PLoS Medicine*, October 2006).

I encourage holiday travelers (flying or not) to take steps to avoid the flu: Wash your hands often and use alcohol wipes or gels when soap and water isn't available. Optimize your immunity by getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and managing stress. Throughout flu season, consider taking immune-enhancing supplements that contain the Chinese herb astragalus, medicinal mushrooms, or both. While the supplement Airborne claims to boost immunity on airplanes, there's no good evidence that it helps prevent flu.

I also plan to get a flu shot. This year, federal health officials recommend the shots for all adults aged 50 and older, in part because the vaccine supply is expected to be plentiful. (In some previous years, the recommendation was for 65 and older.)

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Andrew Weil, MD

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Honey's Surprising Healing Powers

Honey is more than a tasty sweetener. It can also work wonders on your cuts and burns. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Aztecs in Mexico knew this and used honey to heal wounds, and the sticky substance is regaining popularity in some European hospitals as a topical application. I've long used raw honey, which is how it exists in the beehive, to treat minor wounds and burns in place of over-the-counter drugstore remedies and had good results. You can easily find raw honey at natural food stores or online.

How it works. Honey's antibacterial properties, due in part to its hydrogen peroxide content, help to quickly clear an infection and prevent new ones from developing. Honey stimulates the growth of skin tissue, reduces inflammation, and minimizes scarring, and it has the added benefit of creating a smoother surface between the wound and dressing. Since the wound is less likely to stick to the bandage, removing it is easier and less painful, and damage to the newly grown skin tissue is avoided.

The evidence. One recent review of 22 clinical trials concluded that honey typically shortened healing time on many types of

wounds and provided people with better pain relief than antifungal creams or antibiotics (*International Journal of Lower Extremity Wounds*, March 2006). In Bonn, Germany, researchers found that a product called Medihoney (which is waiting for FDA approval in the United States) can heal some wounds faster than most antibiotics (*Supportive Care in Cancer*, January 2006). Medihoney is made of different types of honey native to New Zealand and Australia, including manuka honey, which has a particularly strong antibacterial effect. Honey can also be a useful treatment for people who have built up a tolerance to certain antibiotics. (I know of no evidence that honey helps to heal wounds when consumed as a sweetener.)

How to use. To treat a mild wound or burn—for instance, if you cut yourself or touch a hot iron—first clean it with soap and water and then apply enough raw honey to fill the wound and cover with a bandage. The dressing can be changed once or twice a day and honey reapplied. The honey might temporarily sting when placed on the wound. Don't attempt to self-treat severe cuts and burns; get medical help. 

A Healthier Thanksgiving

You won't find a traditional roasted bird as the centerpiece of my Thanksgiving meal, but you will often see a whole grilled salmon. Since I've not eaten meat for 30 years, I'll celebrate the holiday with a less customary source of protein on my dinner table. And for my daughter who consumes no meat or fish, there'll be a vegetarian roast. Such poultry alternatives include the UnTurkey from Now and Zen, made of wheat gluten (seitan) and covered with a crisp soybean skin, or the Tofurky from Turtle Island Foods made from tofu and seitan with tempeh (fermented soybean) drumsticks. Even so, carving up a seafood or soy-based main course is not for everyone and purists might miss the flavor and taste of the real thing.

Talking turkey. A standard supermarket turkey, known as a Broad-Breasted White, is the bird of choice for most households every November. Yet, some health- and socially conscious consumers pay more for fresh, wild, free-range, and organic options, as well as for heritage varieties direct from the farm. Reasons range from better taste and flavor to individual preference and a greater appreciation for how food is grown or raised. In fact, sales of all organic poultry have nearly doubled in two years, says Holly Givens, public affairs advisor for the Organic Trade Association in Massachusetts. Givens explains that organic standards call for animals to be given organic feed but no antibiotics or growth hormones, and their living conditions must include access to the outdoors. While "organic" is a regulated term for poultry, she adds, "free-range" and "heritage" are not.

Heritage breeds are making a culinary comeback thanks in part to the Slow Food movement, which has worked with farmers and conservationists to preserve breeds from extinction and championed the birds to food lovers. Unlike industrially produced turkeys, which are raised to yield as much white meat as possible, must be artificially inseminated to produce offspring, and are typically brought to market after two months, heritage breeds are raised as much as possible like wild birds. They are allowed to mate and mature naturally, taking twice as long to come to market. And they weigh less, don't look as perfect, and have more dark meat because the birds are allowed more movement to pasture and forage, resulting in stronger legs, thighs, and breasts than commercially raised turkeys. Enthusiasts claim that the meat of such varieties as Bourbon Red, Standard Bronze, and Narragansett is more succulent and flavorful than that of the familiar supermarket bird. Heritage breeds are still in limited supply, meaning you'll have to order early and they may cost nearly \$7 a pound. For local producers of heritage turkeys, visit slowfoodusa.org/ark/turkeys.html.

Healthwise, skinless turkey is a good source of lean protein, with dark meat having more fat than white. Turkey (without gravy) has fewer calories than red meat and supplies B vitamins, zinc, and iron.

About the trimmings. Such perennial favorites as sweet potatoes, cranberries, and stuffing seem as much a part of Thanksgiving as football games and the Macy's parade.

Sweet potatoes are rich in carotenoids and offer healthy carbs if you don't add marshmallows and sugars; also, skip the globs of butter. I prefer the drier, yellow-fleshed type to the moister, orange-fleshed variety. I like them oven-roasted with other root vegetables like carrots, turnips, and parsnips.

Commonly baked in a pie, **pumpkin** is a mild tasting seasonal gourd that's loaded with carotenoids. Native Americans originally grew them less for their flesh and more for their seeds. I'm a bigger fan of other forms of **winter squash**, which I make into a roasted winter squash and apple soup or a delicious squash pie (see recipe below).

Mostly a condiment for turkey, **cranberries** are packed with antioxidants and phytochemicals known for fending off urinary tract infections. I find canned versions lifeless and prefer to make fresh ones into relishes and chutneys.

On a health scale, **stuffing** can range from abysmal to all right depending on the ingredients. It can be made into a healthier, low-glycemic-load dish by using whole-grain breads or wild rice and olive oil instead of butter.

And while Thanksgiving is meant to be a feast, there's no need to eat yourself into a stupor. **SP**

Holiday Squash Pie

This festive dessert from my book *Eating Well for Optimum Health* (Collins, 2001) will sweeten holiday gatherings.

- Preheat oven to 400° F. In a blender, grind cashews until very fine. Add water and blend on high speed for 2 minutes. Add arrowroot powder and blend on low speed for 30 seconds.
- In food processor or mixer, combine squash purée, sugars, brandy, and spices.
- Blend the cashew/arrowroot mixture for another few seconds, then add to the squash mixture until well mixed.
- Divide pie filling equally between two shells. Top with chopped walnuts. Bake pies for 50 to 60 minutes until lightly browned, cracked, and well set.
- Remove pies from the oven, cool, then refrigerate overnight. Serve cool or at room temperature. Serves 16.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup raw cashew pieces
1 cup water
4 1/2 tablespoons arrowroot powder (you can substitute an equal amount of corn, rice, or potato starch, or double this amount of flour)
6 cups cooked puréed winter squash (buttercup, kabocha, banana, or hubbard)
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup light brown sugar, packed
4 tablespoons brandy
3/4 teaspoon powdered ginger
3/8 teaspoon ground cloves
1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
3/4 cup walnuts, chopped
2 unbaked pie shells

PER SERVING

calories	491
carbohydrates	100 g
protein	5.5 g
fat	9.5 g
fiber	3 g

Healing Nights: Natural Approaches to Better Sleep

Having trouble getting a good night's sleep? Join the crowd. One in five Americans struggles with insomnia, sleep problems caused by obstructed breathing or restless limbs, or voluntary sleep deprivation from overwork and overstimulation. Many conventional physicians don't have time to explore the reasons behind a patient's lack of sleep, and reach automatically for their prescription pads.

But prescription sleep medicines do not provide normal, restorative shut-eye. In his book, *Healing Night: The Science and Spirit of Sleeping, Dreaming, and Awakening* (Syren Book Company, 2006), clinical psychologist Rubin Naiman, PhD, suggests a natural path to a good night's sleep that I heartily endorse. Naiman is the sleep expert for the Program in Integrative Medicine, and his sensible approach is rooted in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), a short-term psychotherapy aimed at fostering healthier attitudes and behaviors. CBT has been found in several studies to be as effective as prescription sleeping aids, without negative side effects.

Both Naiman and I believe that good sleep is as essential to a healthy lifestyle as good nutrition and regular exercise. Research increasingly backs this up: In fact, the *Archives of Internal Medicine* devoted its entire September 18, 2006 issue to studies on the connection between good sleep and good health. Sleep is a time when important hormones—such as human growth hormone and melatonin—are normally released. Skimping on sleep has wide-ranging physiological impacts, including abnormal levels of blood sugar, increased levels of inflammatory markers, and even increased hunger. Recent research has linked insufficient or disordered sleep to depression, anxiety, increased pain, lowered immunity, and greater risk for cardiovascular problems, diabetes, cancer, auto accidents, and obesity.

Simple Ways to Radically Improve Sleep

"We need to radically transform how we understand, relate to, and experience sleep," Naiman says. He believes that to experience deep and restorative sleep, you need to recognize the biological roles of darkness and light, set the stage to be more receptive to sleep, and then let yourself surrender to it.

The importance of light and dark. Your sleep cycles are governed by the brain's sleep center, a small bundle of cells that connect to the eyes. These cells use cues from light and darkness to set your daily (circadian) rhythms, which in turn influence the daily patterns of rest and activity of the endocrine, cardiovascular, digestive, and central nervous systems.

These delicate natural rhythms often come crashing up against the realities of a fast-paced and well-lit modern world. Darkness is needed to trigger the release of melatonin, which causes sleepiness and dreaming, while daylight triggers the production of serotonin, which contributes to wakefulness and activity. Before electric light, most Americans got nine hours of sleep a night, rising and going to bed with the sun.

Two Natural Sleep Aids

I often suggest two natural remedies—the herb valerian and the neurohormone melatonin—to bring on sleepiness or help people wean themselves from prescription sleep medicines. Valerian is taken as needed as one or two 300- to 600-mg capsules or tablets of a standardized extract a half-hour before bedtime; to prevent dependency, do not take it for more than two weeks. A dose of .25 to .3 mg of the synthetic form of melatonin can be taken at night as needed to regulate sleep/wake cycles. Studies have found that the higher doses found in many melatonin products on the market cause an unnatural spike in melatonin levels, followed by a steep drop that may actually worsen sleep.

Now adults average less than seven hours of sleep a night and spend as little as 20 minutes a day outdoors exposed to natural light. The end result is not enough darkness to restore body and mind, or enough light to be naturally energized. So you may rely on "counterfeit energy" from caffeine, sugar, constant activity, and stimulating forms of entertainment such as TV to stay awake, and then have to knock yourself out with sleeping pills at night or live with sleep debt.

It's possible to regain sensitivity to natural cues for rest and activity by mimicking natural changes in light throughout the day. Dim the lights to simulate dusk an hour before bedtime, and reduce artificial illumination from TV and computer screens. Sleep in a room with blackout curtains or wear a sleep mask for full darkness at night. Try to awaken naturally without an alarm, or use a dawn simulator, with gradually increasing light. Make a point of getting 20 to 30 minutes of exposure to natural bright light each day. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, get outdoors for some exercise in the morning. If you fall asleep and wake up too early, reset your body clock with bright sunlight or artificial light and more activity later in the day or early evening.

Setting the stage. Many people treat a good night's sleep as a lucky occurrence. But, according to Naiman, "A good night's sleep is about a good day's waking." In other words, how well you sleep at night is closely tied to how well you live your day. "Sleep problems are a lifestyle issue," he says.

Naiman suggests taking an inventory of the various forms of daily stimulation that may be preventing you from sleeping. These include "body noise" (from a fast-paced life, the side effects of medications, use of caffeine or alcohol), "mind noise" (from anxiety or emotions repressed during the day), and bed noise (from a sleeping environment that does not feel cool, dark, quiet, comfortable, or safe). Consider how to replace these influences with others more in tune

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with natural rhythms. For instance, don't bolt out of bed in the morning, but take a few minutes to awake slowly. Cut back on caffeine, sugar, and alcohol. Natural rhythms of rest and activity run in 90-minute cycles, so take a short break when you feel the need. Skip the evening news to restore your emotional equilibrium. Make your bedroom conducive to sleep. Create evening rituals that help you slow down—a hot bath, a journal entry, prayer, or relaxing music.

Naiman often recommends taking a *thought sample* to prevent what he calls “cognitive popcorn”—pesky thoughts that pop into the brain as soon as your head hits the pillow. Before bedtime, take a moment to scribble down your random thoughts (the corn). Then take a minute to think about what you've written and figure out the underlying emotion (the heat under the kettle). If you identify anxiety, try to identify its cause. Then sit with that emotion for a minute

or two. Do not judge or analyze it, but simply acknowledge and feel it. This exercise in mindfulness should turn down the volume on the mind noise so sleepiness can override it.

Surrendering to sleep. According to Naiman, we cannot *go* to sleep, but must allow sleep to *come* to us. “Our inclination to *take something* to sleep must be tempered with the essential psychological and spiritual need to *let go of something* in order to sleep,” he says. What you need to let go of is wakefulness. Once in bed, think about pleasant places or things. Allow your body and mind to relax, without worrying about when you will fall asleep. Lay aside your daytime ego and concerns and be willing to dissolve into the serenity of nothingness. “Sleep is grace. Like the sandman for children, it simply comes to us,” explains Naiman. “All you need do is make sure you're there to receive it. In the end, falling asleep is an act of faith.” ☞

Natural Relief for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

A burning sensation, tingling, pain, or numbness in the hands are symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), which results from compression of a major nerve—the median nerve—that runs through a tunnel from the forearm into the hand under a tough ligamentous band. Although the causes can be many, or even unknown, repetitive activity such as typing or assembly line work is a common trigger; predisposing factors include pregnancy, hypothyroidism, rheumatoid arthritis, a wrist injury, or smaller wrists (which means a narrower tunnel for the median nerve).

Below are some of my top choices for treating CTS, with input from Scott Fried, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and author of *The Carpal Tunnel Helpbook* (Perseus, 2001). Not every treatment works for everyone, so experiment to find what combination offers you the most relief. I wouldn't advise anyone to consider surgery until you've tried all other therapies.

Rest. I'd first recommend identifying what activity might be causing or aggravating the condition, then trying to avoid or minimize it. Resting the affected joint reduces the pressure on the median nerve in the wrist. Some people find that wrist splints help, maybe because they allow the joint to rest in a neutral

position, but they're not a great stand-alone solution. Dr. Fried recommends using flexible or semi-rigid splints, since stiff splints can worsen symptoms by placing undue strain on the wrists or aligning them improperly.

Vitamin B-6 (pyridoxine). Studies have shown mixed results, but many people find vitamin B-6, a nutrient necessary for normal nerve function, helpful for CTS. I usually recommend trying it for six weeks, taking 100 mg twice a day. If you feel numbness anywhere other than your usual CTS symptoms, stop taking it. If vitamin B-6 is effective, you should still phase off it after six weeks, and don't exceed 200 mg per day. High doses can actually cause nerve damage.

Acupuncture. This ancient technique offers symptomatic relief for CTS, theoretically by releasing pain-blocking opioids, improving circulation, and reducing swelling. Research on acupuncture's effectiveness for CTS is inconclusive, although it may work best when combined with other therapies as part of an overall CTS treatment program. To find a qualified practitioner, visit nccaom.org.

Natural painkillers. Some people habitually use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, to manage CTS pain, but studies suggest they don't help much. And long-term use of corticosteroid drugs

can have serious side effects. A natural alternative I like to recommend instead is Zyflamend, an herbal formula from New Chapter that uses the natural anti-inflammatory properties of turmeric, ginger, holy basil, and several other herbs.

Physical & occupational therapy. These can be useful, but choose a professional with expertise in CTS. The treatment may include ultrasound, hydrotherapy, electrical nerve stimulation, and range-of-motion exercises, which can help to break up pain signals, increase blood flow, and reduce swelling and stiffness.

Yoga. This practice can help by countering repetitive movements with stretches and by improving circulation. Iyengar yoga, a form that focuses on proper alignment, seems particularly beneficial for CTS—those practicing 11 postures plus relaxation, twice weekly for two months, improved grip strength and reduced pain compared to those wearing wrist splints (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 11, 1998).

Ergonomics. In *The Carpal Tunnel Helpbook*, Dr. Fried emphasizes stretching exercises, good posture, frequent breaks, and a comfortable workstation. He also suggests keeping wrists and arms in a straight, neutral resting position while at your computer (a wristpad helps). ☞

Ask Dr. Weil | Sunless Tans; Cholesterol Supplements; & More

What do you think of high-dose intravenous vitamin C as a cancer treatment?

It's not something I'd rely on, although there's been some promising recent research. Linus Pauling and colleagues first reported beneficial effects some 30 years ago. When terminal cancer patients for whom conventional treatments offered no further benefits were given 10 grams a day of IV vitamin C for about 10 days, followed by an equivalent oral dosage continued indefinitely, they lived longer than was expected. But later studies by the Mayo Clinic using only oral vitamin C (10 grams a day) found no improvement in cancer patients with or without any prior chemotherapy, and mainstream oncologists abandoned this line of research. However, in the past few years there have been a handful of case reports in which patients with advanced cancer experienced remissions after getting high-dose IV vitamin C in addition to or instead of conventional treatment. And lab tests found vitamin C at concentrations only achievable through IV infusions killed cancer cells while leaving healthy cells unharmed (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, September 20, 2005). Small trials of cancer patients on high-dose IV vitamin C are under way at the University of Kansas and McGill University in Montreal, but it's too early to say which cancers and at what stage might be responsive to the treatment.

What is your take on sunless tanning lotion?

I think sunless tanning lotions, gels, and sprays are harmless, although many look unnatural to my eye. Self-tanners contain a colorless sugar called dihydroxyacetone or DHA (not the same DHA as the omega-3 fatty acid in fish). The sugar interacts with dead cells on the skin's outermost layer and darkens them without any need for sunlight. The tan usually lasts about a week without reapplication. Bronzers, which are basically makeup, come in powder, cream, and lotion form, but these coloring agents wash off after each use.

Some dermatological and cancer-related organizations suggest using self-tanners instead of basking in the sun. But keep in mind that using a self-tanner shouldn't make you feel invincible to the sun's rays. Many don't contain sunscreen or only offer minimal protection from UV rays, so if you're spending much time outside, apply a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher one hour after applying the self-tanner, and reapply every few hours and after swimming. If you use sunless tanning products, wash your hands immediately after applying to avoid discolored palms.

In Boston, scientists have developed a tanning cream, derived from a tropical mint plant, that alters skin pigmentation rather than merely coloring the skin's surface. In tests on fair-skinned mice, the cream recreates the same scenario as when UV rays interact with skin cells, but without damaging DNA. If proven safe for humans, the cream could darken skin and help reduce melanoma risk (*Nature*, September 21, 2006).

Is the lauric acid in many tropical oils beneficial?

Lauric acid, the main fatty acid in coconut and palm kernel oils, has some health benefits, but I don't think your diet should regularly include these highly saturated fats. Although lauric acid is found in breast milk and studies suggest it is an effective antiviral agent for treating herpes, I haven't seen good clinical evidence in humans to justify other reasons for getting more of it. I think many Westerners already get too much saturated fat from fatty meat, poultry skin, cheese, butter, and whole-milk dairy products, and I also recommend minimizing your consumption of tropical oils, such as palm kernel and coconut, and food products made with them.

In the 1980s a vocal outcry from consumers led to the removal of tropical oils from processed foods, such as cookies, crackers, and movie-theater popcorn, but manufacturers replaced them with partially hydrogenated oils, which are even worse for you. Now some tropical oils, which help extend the shelf life of foods, are enjoying a slight resurgence. Palm oil from the fleshy fruit of the palm, rather than the kernel, is healthful, much like other fruit-derived oils (olive and avocado). Proponents of coconut oil have declared it the "healthiest oil on earth," and one naturopathic physician wrote a book on its "healing miracles," recommending people take several tablespoons a day to boost immunity and promote weight loss. I have seen little research to support such health claims, and I do not believe them. I continue to recommend extra-virgin olive oil, a monounsaturated fat with antioxidant activity, as your main cooking fat.

You wrote that red rice yeast supplements are a better bet for lowering cholesterol than policosanols (July 2006). Are there brands you prefer? How much should I take?

Taking supplements of red rice yeast, a Chinese dietary staple made by inoculating rice with a strain of red-pigmented yeast (*Monascus purpureus*), has been found to cut cholesterol levels. Red rice yeast is a natural source of statins with fewer side effects than prescription statin drugs. The

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brand I used to recommend is no longer available in both the United States and Canada, but several others are available at health food stores and online in capsule, tablet, or powder form. A typical dose is 1,200 to 2,400 mg a day; taking it with food will reduce the chances of digestive upset.

Like statin drugs, red rice yeast can also suppress the body's production of heart-healthy Coenzyme Q10, so be sure to take 60 to 90 mg of CoQ10 daily in a softgel form as well. Red rice yeast isn't suggested for pregnant or nursing women or people with liver or kidney disease. And remember, using red rice yeast doesn't eliminate the need to change your dietary and exercise habits for optimal heart and overall health. (For detailed treatment advice, see *Self Healing's* special report on lowering your cholesterol. To order, visit drweilselfhealing.com or call 888-337-9345.)

Health in the News

Live Longer with Green Tea? Drinking plenty of green tea may help you live longer, suggests a large Japanese study. Researchers followed some 40,000 healthy adults aged 40 to 79 for up to 11 years. People who drank five or more 3.4-ounce cups of green tea daily had significantly lower mortality rates than those who drank a cup or less. Women seemed to benefit most: Women in the five-cup-a-day group cut their risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by 31 percent, while men who drank this much reduced their risk by 22 percent. But green tea consumption had no effect on cancer deaths in either sex. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 13, 2006)

Comment: Oolong and black tea, which have lower levels of antioxidant polyphenol compounds than green tea, didn't offer similar cardiovascular protection in this study. Good clinical trials are still needed to confirm the health benefits of green tea, but I and many other physicians recommend including it in your diet.

Take 10 for Your Blood Pressure. Taking three or four short walks a day may be more effective at lowering blood pressure than one long walk, according to a recent study. Researchers compared the effects of four 10-minute walks a day to one 40-minute walk in 20 adults with prehypertension. Although both groups had lower blood pressure, the effect lasted 11 hours in those taking frequent brief walks compared to seven hours following a long one. (*Journal of Hypertension*, September 2006)

Comment: This is good news, since many people find it easier to take a few short breaks for exercise rather than one longer session. I encourage people to use whatever time they can to exercise and keep moving as much as possible throughout the day.

Is liquid fruit pectin safe to take indefinitely for arthritis?

Some people swear by this folk remedy for arthritis, and fruit pectin—which is used as a thickener in homemade jellies and jams—is perfectly safe for long-term use. That said, I don't know of any good scientific evidence that pectin soothes joint pain, and I don't know any reason why it would. Liquid fruit pectin can be found in the canning section of grocery stores, and the Certo brand is often used for arthritis. A common recipe for treatment dissolves 2 teaspoons of Certo in 3 ounces of grape juice and suggests drinking this mixture three times a day. The supplements I recommend most often for osteoarthritis are Zylamend, glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate, and SAM-e; for more on these products, see the July 2006 issue. 

Acupuncture Has Lasting Effects on Back Pain. A few months of acupuncture may pay off in the long run for chronic back pain. Researchers compared the impact of up to 10 acupuncture sessions over three months to standard back pain treatment, including medication, physical therapy, and exercise, in 241 people with chronic back pain. Two years later, the acupuncture group showed a 10- to 15-percent improvement in back pain, reported less worry about it, and used less pain medication compared to the standard treatment group. (*British Medical Journal*, September 23, 2006)

Comment: I expect there would be an even greater benefit if more acupuncture sessions were included during the three-month treatment period. Since acupuncture is often more cost-effective than drugs or physical therapy, I recommend it for treating chronic back pain, and I'm glad to see more practitioners and health insurers recognizing its role in pain relief.

Meditation Tempers Hot Flashes. Participating in a stress reduction program helped decrease the frequency and intensity of women's hot flashes and improve quality of life, a small preliminary study concludes. Fifteen menopausal women who had at least seven moderate to severe hot flashes a day were taught mindfulness-based meditation techniques and asked to keep a daily log of hot flash intensity during the seven-week course and one month after it. On average, the women reported a decrease in the severity and frequency of hot flashes of about 40 percent. (*Menopause*, September/October 2006)

Comment: I don't find these results surprising since mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have proven useful in managing many chronic conditions by changing a person's perception of discomfort. These positive findings should encourage larger studies of women seeking drug-free approaches for menopausal symptoms. 

The SAD Days of Winter

As temperatures dip, many people look forward to cozy fires and warm sweaters. But for others, the shorter days with less natural light bring unwelcome changes in mood, sleeping and eating patterns, and energy levels. This type of depression, called seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, and its milder cousin, the winter blues, can also mean difficulty concentrating, decreased libido, social withdrawal, and carbohydrate cravings.

Although researchers don't know exactly what causes SAD, some believe darker days make your body produce more melatonin, a sleep-regulating neurohormone. Winter's diminishing light may also decrease levels of a mood-influencing neurotransmitter called serotonin. SAD affects up to 6 percent of Americans, and roughly another 14 percent get the winter blues (mostly in northern latitudes with pronounced seasonal changes). It often runs in families, perhaps through a genetic variant that affects serotonin. Women, especially in their 20s through 40s, are more likely to experience SAD than men, possibly because estrogen and progesterone make hormone receptors in women's brains react differently to light.

Treating SAD with Integrative Medicine

Daily exposure to light is the first line of treatment for SAD. If spending more time outdoors doesn't improve symptoms, get a light box, which emits light 10 to 20 times brighter than normal indoor lighting while filtering out harmful UV rays. Research shows light therapy helps 60 to 90 percent of SAD sufferers, often within one week.

Most people respond best to a light box early in the morning. Start with 20 minutes a day, increasing if necessary, suggests Norman Rosenthal, MD, a psychiatrist and author of *Winter Blues* (Guilford Press, 2006). You can also wear a portable light visor or use the light box while exercising indoors. Another option is a dawn simulator, which gradually turns on a bedside lamp in the morning. Light boxes cost between \$250 and \$500. Online vendors include lightforhealth.com and those linked to Dr. Rosenthal's website (normanrosenthal.com). Other treatment options include:

SSRI antidepressants. Studies show that SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) antidepressants, such as Prozac, restore serotonin balance and work as well as light therapy. Although SSRIs have more side effects and take longer to start working, they may be helpful for people who can't maintain or don't respond to light therapy. Combining an antidepressant and light therapy may help lower the drug dosage.

St. John's wort. This popular herb is an excellent antidepressant. One German study hypothesizes that because St. John's wort increases sensitivity to light—essentially magnifying the effect of normal light—it's especially helpful for SAD. Because of this effect, however, taking it along with light therapy can increase the eye's sensitivity to light. A typical dose of St. John's wort is 300 mg three times daily. (Do not take it together with an SSRI antidepressant.)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy. A promising study found that patients who received cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for SAD improved as much as those treated with light therapy, but the people who received CBT as all or part of their treatment were much less likely to relapse the following winter than those treated exclusively with light therapy (*Journal of Affective Disorders*, June 2004). CBT, which emphasizes changing negative attitudes and behaviors, works well alone or with other treatments.

Negative ion therapy. While more research is needed, a few studies suggest high-density negative ion therapy can improve SAD, with no side effects. Used for 20 to 30 minutes a day, high-density generators have the advantage of working even while you sleep to release negative ions into the air. Researchers aren't sure why this therapy helps, but some of Dr. Rosenthal's patients have reportedly benefited from the devices, which cost around \$150 to \$190.

Melatonin. Although contrary to the theory that increased melatonin plays a role in SAD, a recent study found that taking small amounts of melatonin can improve symptoms. Subjects took .1 mg of melatonin every two hours for three or four times a day beginning eight hours after awakening. This preliminary evidence, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (May 9, 2006), suggests the supplement helps your body's internal clock adjust to shorter winter days. With no sustained-release formulas currently available, you may prefer to wait until one is instead of following the study's complicated dosage schedule, suggests lead researcher Alfred Lewy, MD, PhD.

Lifestyle changes. Whatever treatment you choose, I recommend incorporating these measures: Make time to exercise daily. Exercise acts as a natural antidepressant and helps prevent weight gain. Increasing your exposure to light is key, whether it's spending time outside, sitting near bright windows, or adding lamps indoors. And consider vacationing in a sunny place. Use relaxation techniques to help stay emotionally balanced. High-glycemic carbs such as cookies, cakes, and other sweets temporarily increase serotonin, but your mood may darken when your blood sugar drops again. A diet focused on protein and low-glycemic carbs such as whole grains and legumes will lift and sustain both your mood and energy levels. **SP**

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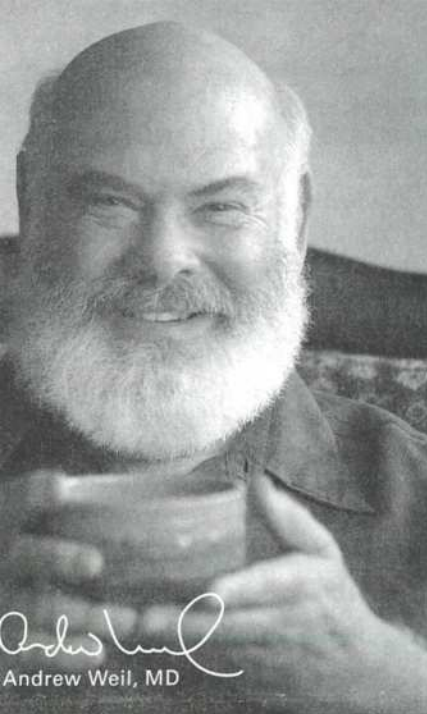
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Stretching

A good stretch is great for dogs and cats and for those of us with two legs: Stretching increases flexibility, tones muscles, and keeps joints lubricated. I like to stretch for about five minutes after a mid-afternoon workout to ease any muscle soreness. (Muscles already warm from exercise are less likely to strain while stretching.) I'm less keen on stretching *before* exercise because there's little evidence it prevents injuries. I also try to stretch my neck and shoulders daily, especially when doing desk work. Experts recommend at least 10 minutes of stretching or other flexibility exercises two or three days a week.

Try this: Here's a soothing stretch for your neck, adapted from *Stretching in the Office* by Bob Anderson (Shelter, 2002). Sit or stand with your arms at your sides. Keeping your shoulders down, tilt your head sideways, first to one side, then to the other. Hold for five seconds on each side. Next, gently tilt your head forward, stretching the back of your neck. Hold this position for five seconds. 

Any Truth to These Food Claims?

Your mom was right: Chicken soup helps quell a cold, while cranberry juice thwarts urinary tract infections. But what do you make of other popular notions about foods and beverages? Are they true or urban legends? I'll give you my assessment of six common ideas.

CLAIM *Spicy foods trigger heartburn.* Not necessarily. The heat from spicy food doesn't cause heartburn. The culprit is more likely to be irritants in greasy foods that happen to be spicy. In fact, red pepper can help gastritis and stomach irritation because it increases blood flow to the stomach, which promotes healing. A recent review found that restricting certain foods, including spicy foods, did not curb heartburn, or acid reflux (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, May 8, 2006).

CLAIM *Soda contributes to bone loss.* Possibly. In a recent study, consuming three or four colas a day was associated with lower bone mineral density in older women. Non-cola carbonated drinks didn't have the same effect (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, October 2006). Some experts believe the phosphoric acid in colas may promote the loss of calcium, while others say caffeine interferes with calcium absorption. I suspect the bone loss may have more to do with soda displacing healthy foods from the diet.

CLAIM *Swallowing sugar can cure hiccups.* It's true; putting a teaspoonful of sugar or honey on the back of the tongue and swallowing slowly can make hiccups go away. Hiccups are abrupt contractions in the diaphragm, followed by a sudden closure of the glottis (the opening between the vocal cords), which temporarily stops the inflow of air. Sugar may stimulate the nerve that causes hiccups, thereby stopping the spasm. Swallowing opens the glottis, which also helps.

CLAIM *Eating late promotes weight gain.* Possibly. You may have heard the idea that the body doesn't burn calories efficiently late at night, but a study of monkeys found that whether they ate by day or by night, they

had an equal chance of gaining weight. It all depended on the amount of calories consumed, not when they were eaten (*Obesity Research*, December 2005). It's true that if you don't eat much all day, you're more likely to overeat at night and make poor food choices.

CLAIM *Green tea helps you lose weight.* Possibly. Stimulants, such as tea, can increase metabolism and decrease appetite. Research also suggests that a polyphenol compound found in green tea called EGCG may kick-start weight loss by stimulating the body to burn calories and decrease body fat. In one study, people who drank a bottle of tea fortified with green tea extract every day for three months lost more body fat than those who drank oolong tea (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2005).

CLAIM *Turkey or warm milk can make you sleepy.* Perhaps, but not for the reasons you might think. Turkey contains an amino acid called tryptophan that's a precursor to the neurotransmitter serotonin, which helps regulate sleep. But it's unlikely you would eat enough turkey to get a sufficient dose of tryptophan to make you drowsy. Any post-Thanksgiving fatigue is most likely due to overeating and alcohol consumption. Milk also contains tryptophan at levels insufficient to promote sleep. But drinking warm milk may speed slumber because it's a comfort food often associated with the bedtime ritual from childhood. 

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Vitamin D plays a role in bone health, but research is discovering its other widespread effects including the prevention of many cancers and autoimmune disorders. After reading about a possible connection between severe vitamin D deficiency and persistent, unexplained musculoskeletal pain in European immigrants, Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, a physician at the University of Minnesota, wondered if the nutrient was a factor in his Minneapolis-based clinic with a large immigrant population. He was curious whether his patients' chronic pain and weakness that had not responded to any treatments may be related to their vitamin D levels.

What he found stunned him. In a study of 150 people aged 10 to 65 with "nonspecific" musculoskeletal pain, nearly everyone—93 percent—had deficient levels. Also, non-immigrants were just as deficient as immigrants, if not more so. And young people had the lowest levels (vitamin D is typically lower in the elderly and homebound who get little sun). Five people had levels so low they were unmeasurable. Women of childbearing age appeared to be at high risk for severe, undiagnosed vitamin D deficiency (*Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, December 2003).

Although more research is needed, Dr. Plotnikoff believes his findings demonstrate the need for routine vitamin D testing for all people with chronic, unexplained pain syndromes. And correcting vitamin D levels with prescription-strength doses may help relieve the pain. Low levels by themselves are a serious health risk. Vitamin D is made naturally when sunlight hits the skin, but many people are using sunscreen or minimizing sun exposure to avoid skin cancer and not getting enough from dietary sources like salmon.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Dr. Andrew Weil's

self healing

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My Best Bets for Battling a Cold

Despite my best efforts, I still catch the occasional cold. But I've found the following natural measures can ease many symptoms and speed my recovery. Here's my plan:

Rest. When I feel a cold coming on, my first priority is to get plenty of rest and sleep, aiming for at least eight hours of shuteye a night.

Garlic. At the first sign of a cold, I eat two cloves of raw garlic for its antibacterial and immune-stimulating properties. I usually eat the garlic mashed or chopped fine, always mixing it with food. When I cook with garlic, I like to add it to dishes late in the cooking process to preserve its antibiotic properties.

Other Natural Remedies. I'll take a trio of supplements throughout a cold. Although there's not much evidence that **vitamin C** helps prevent or treat colds, I find it beneficial. I'll take 1,000 mg of vitamin C daily (ordinarily, I take only 200 mg a day as part of my antioxidant regimen). The immune-boosting herb **andrographis**, also known as Kan Jang, is used widely throughout Scandinavia and has been shown to reduce the

duration (by two to four days), severity, and complications of the common cold. I take a tablet containing 4 percent andrographolides four times a day with meals. I'll also take the herb **astragalus**, long used in Chinese medicine to ward off colds, or the herb **lomatium**, used by native peoples of the Pacific Northwest for inflamed sinuses and viral infections of the lungs. Take 500 mg of astragalus three to four times a day or lomatium in tincture form at a dose of 1 teaspoon, four times a day.

Diet and Exercise. When I've got a cold, I tend to eat less and consume more fluids. Sometimes I'll do a short-term fast, taking in nothing but water and unsweetened herbal tea for one to three days. This rests my digestive system, allowing my body's energy to focus on healing. In addition, I usually cut back or stop exercising. As a general rule, for health problems below the neck, such as a chest cough, I will lay off exercise, and for problems above the neck, such as a mild sore throat or runny nose, I've found that a low- to moderate-intensity workout may be fine. But if I'm fasting, I limit my exercise to walking or gentle stretching. 

Is Big Organic Bad?

Stroll almost any grocery store and you'll likely find the organic label and, in many cases, the store's own line of organically certified food. And earlier this year Wal-Mart pledged to make organic affordable to all with their upcoming line of products. Part of me is glad there is mainstream acceptance, but I worry that organic today is not what people envisioned when they supported a movement based on locally produced food. I recently spoke with Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Penguin, 2006), and Charles Benbrook, PhD, chief scientist at The Organic Center based in Rhode Island, about where the industry is headed and what consumers can do to help it live up to its reputation.

Hearing both sides. Weakening of the current requirements for organic certification issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which requires food to be produced without hormones, antibiotics, pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, radiation, and bioengineering, is not the concern. As Pollan says, "The companies entering the organic market understand they would be killing the goose that laid the golden egg." What worries organic advocates—who, in addition to strict guidelines on how food is produced, support the consumption of whole foods grown locally—is that many of the ideals on which the organic movement was based have been sacrificed. The farm you get your food from is apt to be, on average, 1,500 miles away from your home, says Pollan, and more than 10 percent of organic food is imported from overseas. Large corporations, such as Wal-Mart, make organic food affordable by buying from huge farms to keep costs low and searching overseas for the cheapest production. There are already large "organic feedlots" set up in the desert, explains Pollan, where milking cows never touch a blade of grass. Instead, they eat organic grain that's deficient in omega-3s and beta-carotene, which are obtained by grass-fed cows.

Labels: Beyond Organic?

Critics who feel the organic label belongs to too many ethically challenged companies are looking for a different set of rules. New labels, such as certified naturally grown (CNG), have already been created to encourage people to purchase from small farms that find the organic label certification process burdensome and view it as a program that is only affordable and pleasing to huge organic agribusiness farms. (The certification process is run by Naturally Grown, Inc., a New York-based nonprofit.) So far, 400 farms have signed up. Although I understand the need for greater clarification of standards and an opportunity for more small farms to be certified, I don't think another label is needed. There are already too many that don't mean enough. I would rather work with the organic labeling process from the USDA to improve standards.

And with most organic food these days, there is a huge environmental footprint left from the use of fossil fuels to transport the food. I'm also concerned that the enforcement of regulations in other countries, like China and Mexico, may be less stringent, resulting in an inferior product or the use of chemicals that contaminate soil and drinking water.

The incredible growth in the organic market (it's now the fastest growing sector of the food economy, increasing by 20 percent annually) does have upsides. The demand for organic has attracted some of the world's largest multinational corporations, such as General Mills, Kraft Foods, and Kellogg. As a result, organic food is not only more affordable and available, but more cropland is free of chemicals. In fact, certified organic cropland more than doubled between 1997 and 2003, according to the USDA. With that growth and success, some companies are going above and beyond the federal organic guidelines. Whole Foods and Wild Oats, for example, already have detailed quality standards for products obtained from other countries and have pledged to support the small farmer. In a public letter to Pollan posted on the company's website this summer, John Mackey, chief executive officer of Whole Foods, vowed to encourage store managers to do more business with local farmers and to provide a \$10 million loan fund to help small farmers. Around the same time, Wild Oats announced its "Choose Local" program that showcases organic products from local growers in its 113 natural food stores across North America.

My views. I like that most of my food is grown locally and didn't require gallons of fossil fuel to reach my plate. Yet, wanting to buy organic and eat locally is not easy for everyone. Many local farms are not USDA certified organic for various reasons: Some small farmers find it expensive and complicated to farm organically or get certified. And it's a personal choice whether to purchase local non-organic products or buy imported organic at Wal-Mart, but I encourage people to ask their local farmers what, if any, fertilizers and pesticides they use before making the decision. As Pollan says, "Eating locally is a broader conception of health—it's health of a person and health of the environment. That's what you ingest." Another benefit is that small farms are at less risk of spreading bacteria. "A lot of large farms have a central location where they prepare and package food," says Pollan. "They wash all the lettuce, for example, in one big tub, hence something like *E. coli* can spread rapidly."

Although I agree with Pollan that we're likely to see more organic food imported and, simultaneously, a growth in small local farms to meet consumer demand for freshness, I hope Charles Benbrook's prediction is correct. He believes that as the organic infrastructure grows, the "food miles" traveled by products may drop by half. "It's all going to improve with regional distribution centers," he says. "Instead of going international, more regional food will be grown within the United States." Farmers' markets, which grew 79 percent between 1994 and 2002, may play a key role in providing fresh ingredients, as produce is consistently the #1 seller in the organic market, according to the USDA. 

For a list of local farms and farmers' markets in your area, visit ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets or localharvest.org.

Lesser Known Facts about Women and Heart Disease

In striving for equality with men, women may have achieved parity in an unanticipated area—cardiovascular disease. Although women's chances of developing the disease remain lower than men's through most of life, they catch up in their sixties, or 10 years earlier than scientists previously thought. By age 65, women are having *more* heart attacks than men and appear worse off afterwards.

While awareness is increasing, the women I meet are often more concerned about breast cancer than heart disease. But in fact, about one in 2.5 women will die of heart disease or stroke compared with one in 30 from breast cancer. In many respects, heart disease in women has been neglected: It's been understudied and underfunded as well as underdiagnosed and undertreated. That's slowly changing. Word of the many gender differences in heart disease is getting out, and I'll spotlight five of them.

1 Heart disease is the single most important issue in women's health. For years, heart disease was thought of as a man's problem or a disease of old age. "Health professionals told women they didn't have to worry about heart disease, and now we're trying to undo this," says cardiologist Mimi Guarnieri, MD, medical director of the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine in La Jolla, California, and author of *The Heart Speaks* (Simon & Schuster, 2006). Cardiovascular disease is a woman's #1 health threat and the leading killer of women and men in this country.

Even so, not all women have gotten this message. In a survey done by the American Heart Association, 55 percent of US women knew that heart disease was their top cause of

death in 2005, up from 34 percent in 2000. But this level of awareness was less than 40 percent among African American and Hispanic women, who are at higher risk.

2 Women have subtler symptoms. Many people fail to interpret their symptoms as a heart attack because they aren't classic, says Stephen Devries, MD, director of the integrative program for heart disease at the University of Illinois. At his Healthy Heart Center in Deerfield, Dr. Devries has found that while men tend to have chest tightness or heaviness, women more often have shortness of breath, back or shoulder pain, or racing heartbeats (see box). "It takes a high level of suspicion on the part of the patient and health-care provider to identify the seriousness of women's symptoms."

Indeed, the warning signs in women can be more ambiguous and wide-ranging than in men. In a study of more than 500 women who had suffered a heart attack, the most frequently reported symptoms were unusual fatigue, described by 70 percent of participants, followed by difficulty sleeping in nearly 50 percent, shortness of breath or indigestion in some 40 percent, with 35 percent having anxiety (*Circulation*, November 25, 2003). Complicating matters, physicians might be slower to recognize heart attacks in women, who tend to downplay the seriousness of their symptoms, attribute them to another ailment like flu, and delay seeking treatment.

3 In some women, heart disease affects small vessels rather than large arteries. Earlier this year, results from the groundbreaking Women's Ischemia Syndrome Evaluation (WISE) were released. It was the first time that only women with chest pain, all of whom had undergone coronary angiography and other testing, were tracked for roughly five years. No one had studied such a large group (nearly 1,000 women) before, says C. Noel Bairey Merz, MD, who directs the women's heart center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and chaired the WISE investigation, "so every finding was novel, surprising, and valuable."

Of 936 women with an average age of 58, only a third had obvious blockages in their coronary arteries on an angiogram (in a similar number of men with chest pain, three-quarters or more would have serious blockages). The remaining two-thirds were considered to have "clear" arteries and incorrectly labeled low risk. But this might have been false reassurance. The WISE researchers estimate that as many as 3 million out of 12 million American women with heart disease may not have cholesterol plaque that builds up into major blockages in the large blood vessels (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, February 6, 2006).

Instead of obvious blockages, many women (and some men) are prone to a more diffuse type of plaque in the smaller branches of the arteries. It can escape detection by angiogram, which is the supposed "gold standard" of heart

Could It Be a Heart Attack?

Although physicians might consider them "atypical" symptoms, they might be the more typical warning signs of a heart attack in women.

Classic Symptoms

- Tightness, fullness, or pressure in the chest
- Squeezing or pain in the center of the chest
- Recurring chest discomfort
- Pain spreading to the shoulders, neck, arms (especially the left arm), or jaw
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating; clammy skin or paleness
- Nausea or lightheadedness

More Likely Signs in Women

- Unusual fatigue or weakness
- New, unusual shortness of breath during everyday activities or at rest
- Dizziness or nausea
- Discomfort between shoulder blades
- Back pain or upper chest discomfort
- Indigestion or mild heartburn
- Sense of doom or anxiety
- Racing heartbeats (palpitations) or feeling extra heartbeats
- Flu-like symptoms, including chills and cold sweats

tests. In this hidden type of heart disease, called coronary microvascular disease, plaque spreads evenly along artery walls so they appear normal instead of as clumps and visible blockages. According to Dr. Bairey Merz, women with recurring chest pain and abnormal stress testing but open arteries on angiogram might still be at high risk.

4 Tests may be less accurate in women. An angiogram is not the only test that can miss heart problems in women. Treadmill stress tests are also less reliable. Tests that monitor only the EKG (electrical activity of the heart) are notoriously inaccurate in women, says Dr. Devries. His advice? “Insist on tests that include pictures of the heart using ultrasound (stress echocardiogram) or a radioactive dye (nuclear stress test).”

Dr. Devries feels women need special consideration for other heart risks like HDL (“good”) cholesterol; desirable levels in women are over 50 mg/dL (it’s over 40 in men) and when it falls below this value, risk appears to be even higher in women than men. Recent research also suggests women on average have higher C-reactive protein (CRP) levels—a sign of inflammation—than men. It’s still not known how predictive CRP testing is for heart disease.

5 After diagnosis, women might not receive the correct health care. Women are less likely than men to be put on medication, referred for cardiac rehabilitation, or get procedures such as angioplasty, stents, or bypass surgery. And they’re less apt to survive a heart attack or stroke.

Women need to be strong advocates for their own heart health, advises Dr. Devries. “If there is a history of heart disease in your family or you have some other risk factors, be proactive in seeking preventive care.” Dr. Guarneri advocates a similar proactive course since women tend to be caregivers first and put themselves last. She recommends knowing your ABCs, her shorthand for the following heart factors: A for hemoglobin A1c (a test measuring blood sugar control in people with diabetes), B for blood pressure, C for cholesterol and C-reactive protein, D for diet, and E for emotional status. Women over 60 might be more vulnerable to a type of temporary heart failure known as “broken heart” syndrome following extreme emotional stress. **SP**

Visit womensheartfoundation.org and goredforwomen.org. For a listing of women’s heart centers, see womenheart.org.

Food, Plastics, and Your Health Revisited

Lots of you wrote in after the “Living Better with Plastics” article appeared in the September issue, so I decided to respond to some inquiries. Clearly, readers are as concerned as I am about how plastic affects both food and health.

If plastics are not labeled with a number, are they safe? The numbers on the bottom of plastic containers are “resin ID codes” intended to help consumers sort plastics for recycling. (See the September 2006 issue for a list of good and bad plastics by number.) If they don’t have a number, you need to ask the manufacturer what type of plastic it’s made with. Avoid product that contain bisphenol A (BPA), polystyrene, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), or di-(2-ethylhexyl) adipate (DEHA). In studies on mice and rats, these chemicals have been shown to alter normal development and function.

Many manufacturers claim their #7 plastics are safe, but you said to avoid them. Who’s right? The #7 recycling code means “other plastics.” But most #7 bottles—including some popular sports water bottles—are polycarbonate plastic made with BPA. This chemical, which alters normal hormonal

activity and mimics the effects of estrogen, can leach from polycarbonate. In mice and rats, exposure to BPA has led to birth defects, miscarriages, mental retardation, breast and prostate cancers, early puberty, and reduced sperm counts. Many manufacturers and retailers claim that #7 polycarbonate plastics with BPA are safe. But I believe the potential leaching of BPA into foods or beverages is reason to avoid this plastic.

Are plastic dishes that are labeled “microwave safe” OK? I would avoid using plastic in the microwave. “Microwave safe” means the plastic won’t melt, but it doesn’t guarantee that chemicals will not leach into food. Heat speeds up this migration.

If food has been wrapped in plastic for weeks in the store, isn’t the damage already done? Perhaps. The plastic on many pre-wrapped foods at the grocery store, such as block cheeses and ground meat, is made of polyvinyl chloride, which contains plasticizers shown in studies involving mice to cause birth defects, fetal death, and damage to the liver, kidneys, lungs, and reproductive systems. Plastic continues to leach over time, so the

longer it’s wrapped the more chemicals will leach into your food. Since it might be difficult to avoid plastic-wrapped food altogether, I advise people to limit purchasing it and to unwrap foods bought in plastic and rewrap it in wax paper. Or you can store it in a non-plastic container, such as glass or ceramic. You may want to remove the outer layer of cheese if it was wrapped in this plastic, since fat increases leaching.

Are plastic bags safe for food storage? It’s fine to freeze food in bags or containers made from polyethylene and polypropylene, plastics that do not appear to pose health problems, says Frederick vom Saal, PhD, a professor of reproductive biology at the University of Missouri-Columbia who studies the effects of chemicals in plastics. But use a non-plastic container in the pantry or refrigerator, since all plastics have the potential to leach if exposed to heat or fat.

How can I learn more about plastic and food? For a list of popular plastic products and what they are made of, see the report on plastic containers at thegreenguide.com. For more on plastics, visit ourstolenfuture.org. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Erectile Dysfunction; Dental Sealants; & More

Are Kegel exercises helpful for erectile dysfunction?

I wouldn't rely solely on Kegel exercises to help treat erectile dysfunction (ED). Kegels involve tightening and releasing the pelvic muscle that controls urination, and are commonly suggested to people with urinary incontinence, especially women before and after childbirth. In a study of 55 men with ED, researchers randomly assigned some of them to undergo lifestyle changes, while the others revamped their lifestyle plus did Kegels. After three months, results were encouraging for the latter group, and all the participants were put on the Kegel regimen. Three months later, 40 percent of all men had regained normal sexual function (*BJU International*, September 2005). A urologist can advise men how to do Kegel exercises.

These findings are encouraging, but I'm not convinced Kegels are the best way of resolving ED. Viagra and related drugs are extremely effective and a better choice for most men than herbal remedies such as *Ginkgo biloba*, Asian ginseng, and ashwagandha. If you want to experiment with these herbs, take one at a time for six to eight weeks. (Asian ginseng may worsen high blood pressure, insomnia, and anxiety.)

Lifestyle strategies can also help prevent and treat impotence. Watch your saturated fat intake and get regular exercise to promote good circulation. Avoid medications that can contribute to ED, such as many antidepressants and some heart drugs. If you ride a bike for more than 10 hours a week, studies show that you're more likely to get ED. Try a split seat that puts less pressure on the perineal area.

I heard you mention on PBS taking one ibuprofen a day for Alzheimer's disease prevention. Do you mean Motrin? And if I take ibuprofen, can I also take a baby aspirin?

To help prevent Alzheimer's disease, I often recommend taking 400 mg a day of turmeric, a spice and natural anti-inflammatory. People with a strong family history of Alzheimer's may also want to take one 200 mg tablet or capsule of ibuprofen (sold as Motrin and Advil) daily. There's some evidence that inflammation plays a role in the development of the disease and the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may help reduce this risk. These over-the-counter pain relievers might bind to abnormal protein deposits, or amyloid plaques, found in the brains of Alzheimer's patients, possibly helping to dissolve existing plaque or slow its formation. But taking ibuprofen or other NSAIDs regularly is not without risk, as higher doses can cause gastric bleeding and kidney damage.

Got a diet or nutrition question for Dr. Weil?

Visit us at drweilselfhealing.com or send to Ask Dr. Weil, *Self Healing*, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472 by December 1, 2006. We'll answer selected questions in our February 2007 special issue on food.

It's fine to take ibuprofen as a preventive against Alzheimer's as well as a daily low-dose or baby aspirin for cardiovascular protection, but I would take them at different times of day. A scientific paper released by the FDA this past September warns of an interaction between low-dose (not enteric coated) aspirin and 400 mg of ibuprofen when taken at the same time that might make the aspirin less useful in protecting against heart disease and stroke. The FDA encouraged consumers who are taking these two drugs regularly at these dosages to take the ibuprofen at least 30 minutes after taking aspirin or at least eight hours before to avoid any potential drug interactions.

You often recommend grinding whole flax seeds. What do you think of ground flax seeds in grocery stores?

I think buying flax seeds already ground defeats the purpose because the seeds are especially susceptible to oxidative damage, which breaks down the beneficial omega-3 fatty acids in them. It's hard to know when seeds were ground and packaged and how they were stored. For the most benefit, grind flax seeds daily or a half-cup at a time and refrigerate them in an airtight opaque container for up to 30 days.

I've read that a study revealed estrogen-mimicking compounds in the saliva of teenagers with sealed teeth. Do you think teeth sealants are safe?

Many dentists recommend teeth sealants to prevent cavities in children and teenagers. They're made of a plastic material that bonds to molars, acting as a barrier between the tooth enamel and plaques and acids. You're referring to a 1996 study that said bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical that's used to make plastics and can potentially mimic estrogen, leached out of dental sealants. In animals, exposure to BPA has led to early puberty, breast and prostate cancers, and reduced sperm counts. But subsequent research on sealants detected no BPA in the bloodstream of people. My Tucson-based holistic dentist, Steven Swidler, DDS, tells me that BPA is mainly a concern when sealants are applied haphazardly, which is less common as techniques and formulations have improved.

However, Dr. Swidler doesn't use sealants on his patients for other reasons. "The majority of teeth with sealants have decay under them," he says. Over time, the sealant weakens, which may allow the tooth to decay, but the seal itself can make it easier for any damage to go undetected for a longer period. When a cavity is found, it may be large and need more complicated treatment.

An alternative to sealants is simply being more vigilant about oral hygiene: Make sure your kids brush twice a day, floss once a day, and get regular dental checkups and cleanings. At health food stores, you can find toothpastes containing natural germicidal agents such as tea tree oil and neem. Decreasing the amount of sugar and refined carbohydrates in the diet also helps prevent teeth from breaking down.

I have read that pomegranate juice was comparable to grapefruit juice in affecting drug metabolism. Is it safe to drink if on medication?

I think so. There's preliminary evidence from a few lab studies and a recent case report in a cardiology journal suggesting that pomegranate juice might possibly interact with some medications. The extent and strength of that drug interaction is not known. One study looked at human liver cells and compared the ability of various fruit juices, including pomegranate and grapefruit, to influence an enzyme needed to help break down certain drugs. Of all juices tested, grapefruit had the most potential to block this drug pathway (known

as cytochrome P450), followed by juices from black mulberry, wild grape, pomegranate, and black raspberry. It's unclear if these results would be found in the human body. But there's solid evidence that grapefruit juice can block this pathway, resulting in higher blood levels of certain cholesterol-lowering statins, calcium channel blockers for hypertension, some immunosuppressants, and other medications.

It seems safe to drink antioxidant-rich pomegranate juice if you're on medication, and I think the potential for drug interaction appears much less significant than the concerns about grapefruit juice. (The strength of the drug interaction is also influenced by how much juice you typically drink and how often.) 

Health in the News

Weighing In Keeps Pounds Off. People who check their weight often are better at maintaining it, finds a new study of 314 people who had recently slimmed down. Researchers divided participants into three groups: One met face-to-face for support once a week, another met on the Internet weekly, and a third received literature on how to maintain a healthy weight. The two groups meeting weekly were also encouraged to weigh themselves daily, exercise an hour a day, and follow a healthy diet. Seventy-two percent in the literature group gained five or more pounds compared to only 55 and 46 percent in the Internet and face-to-face groups. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, October 12, 2006)

Comment: Motivation is the key to any lifestyle change. The daily weigh-ins and weekly guidance most likely gave participants the sense of control they needed to change their food and fitness habits and keep weight off.

Walnuts May Protect Arteries. Eating walnuts may help protect your arteries from the damage caused by a high-fat meal, suggests a small study. For a month, 24 participants ate a strict Mediterranean diet. Then each was given two high-fat salami-and-cheese sandwiches, eaten one week apart. Half the volunteers also ate approximately eight walnuts, while the others added 5 teaspoons of olive oil to the meal. Tests show that both the walnuts and olive oil reduced inflammation in the arteries, but only those eating nuts seemed to preserve their arterial elasticity. (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, October 17, 2006)

Comment: Walnuts and olive oil are rich in omega-3 fats that reduce inflammation, but walnuts also contain arginine, an amino acid that helps produce nitric oxide, a chemical that keeps blood vessels flexible for normal blood flow. This study offers another good argument for including walnuts in your diet.

Pumping Iron Benefits Knee Arthritis. Weight room visits may become doctor's orders for people with knee osteoarthritis (OA). A recent study found that an upper- and lower-body strength training program done for 2.5 years helped slow knee OA. Researchers divided 221 older adults into four groups, comparing people with and without OA pain who followed two different exercise programs. First, about half the participants strength-trained while the rest did flexibility exercises twice a week in a fitness center and once weekly at home for more than a year. Then participants did only home workouts for a year and a half more, returning every six months for evaluations. Those who lifted weights retained more of their lower-body strength and delayed OA progression. (*Arthritis & Rheumatism*, October 15, 2006)

Comment: Workouts with weights appeared to slow not only the loss of muscle seen with aging, but also the advance of knee OA. For many reasons, strength training is valuable throughout life and especially for older adults.

DHEA: No Fountain of Youth. The hormone DHEA, widely promoted as an anti-aging supplement, doesn't reverse the effects of aging, says a new study. Researchers evaluated 144 older men and women with low DHEA levels who took relatively high doses of oral DHEA (75 mg a day for men, 50 mg for women) or a placebo for two years. No benefits were found in muscle strength, exercise capacity, body fat, glucose tolerance, or quality of life. Men who took DHEA or low-dose testosterone (5 mg per day) showed small increases in bone density, but the benefits from either were smaller than those typically seen with bone-strengthening drugs. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, October 19, 2006)

Comment: I'm not surprised by the results of this study, one of the largest and longest to examine DHEA's effects on aging markers. Although no significant side effects were found, other research suggests DHEA may slightly increase risks of breast and prostate cancers. 

3 Views on Happiness

Cooking, caring for plants, connecting with friends, playing with my dogs—these are some things that make me happy. It's hard for anyone to enjoy optimum health and well-being without regular “doses” of happiness, so I always ask my patients “What brings you joy?” when obtaining medical histories. As 2006 draws to a close, I'll look at three engaging books from this year that examine what makes us happy and why. One common thread running through these writings is that happiness is something you can practice—that you can get better at—not just a passive experience that happens to you.

1 *The Science of Happiness* by German science journalist Stefan Klein, PhD (Marlowe & Company), asserts that people are “programmed for positive feelings.” Brain research reveals that humans have dedicated circuits for pleasure and enjoyment. For instance, the left half of the brain tends to be more active when feelings are positive, the right half when they're negative. What's more, you can strengthen the circuits for positive feelings by seeking out situations that make you happy. In effect, happiness can become a self-reinforcing habit, suggests Klein. He also sheds light on the chemistry of joy: Endorphins, the body's own “feel good” chemicals, alter the perception of time, which helps to explain why it seems to fly when you're having fun.

As for what makes people happy, friendship and love trump money and status. “In large international surveys, people for whom money, success, fame, and good looks are especially important are less satisfied than those who strive for good relationships with others, develop their talents, and are active in social causes,” says Klein. The body also plays an important role in generating positive emotions: “Exercise and sex have proven the surest means of raising our spirits.” Working out may help women especially. In studies, up to 20 percent more women than men said they felt better after physical activity, for unknown reasons. A sense of autonomy matters, too. Residents of senior facilities who were encouraged to decide the details of their daily lives, such as meals or excursions, expressed greater happiness—and lived longer.

2 *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill* by French-born Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard (Little, Brown) acknowledges that some people are naturally happier than others, but holds that “achieving durable happiness . . . requires sustained effort in training the mind and developing a set of human qualities, such as inner peace, mindfulness,

and altruistic love.” Ricard, who left his career as a cellular geneticist to study Buddhism in the Himalayas, is involved (as both researcher and research subject) in studies on the effects of meditation on the brain, and he details some of the striking findings. While meditating on compassion, long-time meditators showed “an extraordinary increase” in activity in brain areas linked with positive emotions.

Ricard explores the differences between genuine happiness—an optimal state of being—and fleeting pleasures, and he offers meditation exercises to help readers make these distinctions. By cultivating inner peace, says Ricard, we can get off the “hedonic treadmill” on which “we need to keep running toward acquiring more things and new sources of excitement simply to maintain our current level of satisfaction.” He also offers a glimpse at the tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, located between China and India, which considers “gross national happiness” more important than gross national product and strives to balance cultural and environmental preservation with industry and tourism. (In a recent ranking of the happiness of nations, released after this book was published, Bhutan placed 8th while the United States was 23rd; Denmark topped the list.)

3 *Stumbling on Happiness* by Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert (Knopf) is less about how to be happy than why people are so bad at predicting it. Gilbert argues that neither positive nor negative events affect people as much or for as long as they anticipate. You may think a bigger house or a fancier car will make you happier, he explains, but once you have it, you may want something better. Meanwhile, you may expect to be crushed by losing a job or a romantic partner, but such negative events can trigger your “psychological immune system” so you come to see adversity in a positive light. Indeed, you may even look back and say getting sacked or jilted was the best thing that ever happened to you!

One reason people keep making these erroneous predictions, suggests Gilbert, is they're just as bad at remembering their past emotions as they are at predicting their future ones. For instance, Gore voters weren't as devastated as they anticipated when Bush won the 2000 presidential election. But a few months later, they *remembered* being just as devastated as they had *expected* to be, thereby eliminating the evidence of their own faulty forecast. Also, overestimating one's own uniqueness can make it difficult to learn from others' experiences. Most people would rather see a restaurant's menu than a randomly selected diner's review, but research suggests the latter would be more helpful to predict how much you're going to enjoy dinner. Gilbert's lessons about these quirks of mind are leavened with a great deal of wit and make for—what else?—happy reading. 

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